

Assessment systems for the future: the place of assessment by teachers

Summary of Report of Seminar 1, held in Cambridge, January 12th and 13th 2004

The full report is on the ARG website: www.assessment-reform-group.org.uk

This is a report of the first in a series of seminars and conferences conducted by the Assessment Systems for the Future (ASF) project. The project, developed by the members of the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) and funded by the Nuffield foundation, is studying the practices and issues relating to the role that assessment by teachers can take for summative purposes. Its overall goals are: to clarify thinking by educational professionals, by politicians and by others involved in education, about the nature, practice, potential and challenges of assessment by teachers; and to provide reports including recommendations for policy and practice about the role that assessment by teachers can take in assessment systems. The project is advised by a Core Group of practitioners and representatives of policy-making bodies. The members of this group (including all members of ARG) attend all the events; additional participants are invited according to the special focus of each seminar.

The first seminar began by exploring current understandings of assessment by teachers and the involvement of teachers in summative assessment. This revealed a not unexpected need for conceptual clarification about the terms being used in relation to assessment by teachers and of the different purposes it can serve. Several points were raised about the current practice of summative assessment as required by some assessment systems. A presentation of findings from a systematic review of research on the reliability and validity of assessment by teachers used for summative purposes, followed by group discussions, led to a number of suggestions for improving the dependability (that is, the combination of reliability and validity) of teachers' assessments for these purposes.

Issues relating to the formative and summative use of assessment and how development of effective practice of the former might help development of teachers' practice in summative assessment were explored in an input from Paul Black. Finally, participants attempted to bring together their views on the problems of why changes to current assessment systems are needed, what changes are desirable and how to bring them about. The points made also identified some research and development that is needed and the problems facing any new system.

It was recognised that this seminar was an initial one, intended to uncover problems in current systems and in thinking about them, rather than to propose solutions. All the issues raised will be revisited in subsequent seminars with the benefit of inputs about differences in how assessment by teachers is used of summative assessment in various countries within and outside the UK and through the views of participants in and users of educational assessment.