



Department
for Education

Consultation Response Form

Consultation closing date: 18 December 2014

Your comments must reach us by that date

Performance descriptors for use in key stage 1 and 2 statutory teacher assessment for 2015 / 2016

If you would prefer to respond online to this consultation please use the following link: <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations>

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reason for confidentiality:	

Name: Julie McCulloch	
Please tick if you are responding on behalf of your organisation.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Name of Organisation (if applicable): Pearson	
Address: Halley Court, Jordan Hill, Oxford, OX2 8EJ	

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the Ministerial and Public Communications Division by e-mail: consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the Gov.uk ['Contact Us'](#) page.

Please insert an 'x' into one of the following boxes which best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> School
<input type="checkbox"/> Governor	<input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other

Please Specify: **Education service provider**

1 Do the names of the draft performance descriptors allow teachers and parents to understand the meaning of, and differentiate between, each performance descriptor?

If no, please provide details.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure
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Comments:

The names of the draft performance descriptors are relatively clear (although the varying number of descriptors for different subjects and different key stages could be problematic – see answer to Question 2 below).

There are, however, a couple of issues we would advise the Department to consider:

- The description 'Below national standard' is much balder than the equivalents that tend to be used at the moment ('emerging', 'working towards', etc.). 'Below national standard' certainly has the benefit of clarity, but some teachers and, particularly, parents, may find it a rather harsh way of describing very young children.
- The term 'mastery' appears to be being used differently here from the way it is generally used in curriculum discussions. Descriptions of curricula based on a 'mastery model' tend to emphasise the importance of 'holding the cohort together' – of enabling as many pupils as possible to 'master' the curriculum. This would suggest that, in most contexts, 'mastery' is seen as synonymous with 'working at the national standard'. This is explicitly stated in the expert panel's 2011 report for the National Curriculum review, in which Tim Oates and colleagues recommend an approach that enables as many pupils as possible to be 'ready to progress at the end of each key stage, having *mastered* the knowledge identified in relevant schemes of work and/or Programmes of Study' [my italics].

The terminology being proposed here, however, uses the term 'mastery' to mean 'working at the highest possible standard'. As the

concept of mastery is core to understanding the conceptual framework behind the new curriculum and assessment approaches, we would urge the Department to ensure the term is used consistently, so there is no room for confusion over what 'mastering' the curriculum actually means. One solution (if a five point scale is used – see answer to Question 2) could be to change the name of the 'top' descriptor from 'mastery standard' to 'significantly above national standard', or something similar.

2 Are the performance descriptors spaced effectively across the range of pupils' performance to support accurate and consistent judgements?

If no, please provide details.

Yes No Not Sure

Comments:

On the whole, the performance descriptors appear appropriately and effectively spaced. There are a few examples where accurate and consistent judgements may be made more difficult as a result either of inconsistencies between the descriptors and the National Curriculum, or of the use of ambiguous or subjective phrases – see answers to Questions 3 and 4 for examples of these.

We have concerns, however, about the proposal to use a mixture of five point, four point and binary scales, for a number of reasons:

- It seems unnecessarily inconsistent and confusing. The rationale for this appears to be to do with the systems proposed for monitoring floor standards, rather than providing support for meaningful teacher assessment.
- For those subjects/key stages using four point scales, it seems odd that there are two descriptors for pupils working below the national standard, and only one for pupils working above that standard. This seems to give out the wrong message in a curriculum that is about having high expectations for all.
- The decision to judge some subjects using a binary 'working at the national standard or not' descriptor (science at both key stages, maths and reading at KS2) begs the question of the purpose of having performance descriptors at all. In this case, surely the question is simply whether children are able to do most of the things laid out in the curriculum for that subject?

We would encourage the Department to consult further on the most appropriate scale to use for the performance descriptors (as well as on

the names used, particularly 'below national standard' and 'mastery standard', for the reasons given in the answer to Question 1), and to apply this scale consistently across subjects and key stages.

3 In your opinion, are the performance descriptors clear and easy to understand?

If no, which bullets lack sufficient clarity to allow for effective teacher assessment?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Most performance descriptors seem clear and easy to understand. However, the desire to make it clear that teachers should stretch children by encouraging them to explore the curriculum in greater depth, and to build on the breadth of their knowledge and skills within that key stage rather than exposing them to elements of the curriculum from the following key stage, sometimes leads to some rather subjective and ambiguous phrases, which could be interpreted by different teachers in different ways.

For example, the mastery standard descriptors in Maths use phrases like 'solve more complex problems', 'all aspects ... are embedded', 'a wider range of numbers', without defining what 'more complex', 'embedded' or 'a wider range' mean. In Reading, children working towards national standard at KS1 will be able to retell a 'range' of stories, while those at national standard will have a 'wide range' at their fingertips.

In instances like these, we think it will be difficult for teachers to decide which statement best fits each child. This could lead to ineffective and inconsistent teacher assessment. This could be addressed by the Department providing exemplars of what more complex problems, or embedded understanding, or a range of stories, actually looks like for children working at different standards.

4 In your opinion, does the content of the performance descriptors adequately reflect the national curriculum programmes of study?

If no, please state what amendments are required.

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

This is broadly the case. There are a few instances, however, where differences have crept in, which it would be helpful to iron out.

Differences we have noticed are:

Maths

There are some changes in terminology/phrasing between the descriptors and the curriculum and we would recommend that where possible the same wording is used throughout both documents. Often these changes are minor (e.g. pupils working at national standard in KS1 should be able to 'compare and order intervals of time', whereas the curriculum states children should 'compare and sequence intervals of time') but occasionally they are more obvious and striking, with curriculum objectives completely re-worded into two or more separate bullet points. We would recommend that wherever possible there is consistency in terminology and objective referencing between the curriculum and the performance descriptors.

More problematic is a discrepancy we have identified between the descriptors and the curriculum itself (where new requirements creep into the descriptors that haven't been identified within the statutory curriculum guidance). In KS1 Number – addition and subtraction, the descriptors state that pupils working at the national standard are able to 'add and subtract numbers using objects, pictorial representations and the written columnar methods'. In the curriculum, columnar methods are not listed within the statutory requirements (instead they are listed in the non-statutory notes and guidance and it is noted that 'addition and subtraction in columns supports place value and prepares for formal written methods with larger numbers'). Children should not be required

to demonstrate skills that haven't been listed as statutory in the original curriculum document.

Science

In Science there is a discrepancy between the topics in the National Curriculum and how they are grouped together in the performance descriptors. For example, in the National Curriculum at KS1 we have topics such as Plants, Animals, and Living Things and their Habitats, whereas in the performance descriptors these are divided up into two groupings: 'Biology - Structure and Function' and 'Biology - Interdependence'. Chemistry units have a clearer mapping from National Curriculum topics into performance descriptor groupings, and in physics some units are merged together (e.g. Light and Sound). It would be better to keep topics consistent with the National Curriculum rather than creating new groupings.

Reading

It seems inappropriate to require even children working below the national standard in reading to regard reading as a pleasurable activity. Does that imply that children who don't enjoy reading should never be considered to have moved off the P-scales? We don't believe it is possible to objectively measure children's enjoyment, so would suggest that this requirement is removed from the performance descriptors.

5 Should any element of the performance descriptors be weighted (i.e. should any element be considered more important or less important than others?).

If yes, please detail which performance descriptor(s), which element(s) and why.

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Our view is that weighting would be hugely complex, and probably unnecessary. In a slimmed-down curriculum, all elements should be important.

There may be an opportunity at this point, however, to review the elements that have been included in the performance descriptors, to ensure they focus on the key skills which are crucial for future development and study. The Maths descriptors, for example, include 'Read Roman numerals to 1000 (M)'. We would argue that this isn't particularly important at this stage of development, nor is it crucial for later development, and so it isn't necessary to include it in the performance descriptors.

It would also be helpful to provide more clarity on how teachers should assess whether or not a description matches a child's attainment. The consultation suggests that pupils 'must demonstrate the majority of the elements described'. 'The majority' could be interpreted in quite different ways by different teachers, leaving the system open to inconsistency and potential over-reporting.

6 If you have any further comments regarding the performance descriptors, please provide details. For example, is there further supporting information that would be helpful in understanding and using the performance descriptors?

Comments:

We have a number of comments that aren't directly addressed by the questions above:

- The proposed gap between the top of the P-scales and the 'below national standard' performance descriptor, and the proposed solution of providing a code for pupils who fall into this gap, seems confusing and potentially divisive. We would suggest that the two scales should dovetail.
- While the consultation document suggests that these descriptors are designed only to be used to inform teacher assessment at the end of each key stage, teachers have told us that they may choose to use the same approach and terminology between key stages, for consistency. We would advise the Department to be aware of this likely secondary use of the descriptors, particularly the terminology used to describe the standard children have reached, and to consider whether there is anything they would consider inappropriate if they are used in this context.
- It would be very helpful, particularly in terms of helping parents to understand the new system, to ensure there is consistency between the performance descriptors and the scaled scores pupils will receive on national curriculum tests. The deputy head and blogger Michael Tidd recently highlighted the potential for reports to parents to become complex to the point of being nonsensical, with the possibility of tables like this being presented:

	Test	TA
Reading	128	Yes
Writing		Working above national standard
Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar	99	
Mathematics	117	Yes
Science		Yes

In order to avoid this, we would suggest that the SATs scaled scores are described using the same terminology used in the performance descriptors. So a scaled score between, for example, 95 and 105 could be described as 'at national standard', a score between 105 and 115 could be described as 'above national standard', etc. This would help parents get to grip with the new system more effectively, and give them a much clearer understanding of their child's achievements across the board.

- Our work with teachers suggests that many aren't experienced or confident in stretching children by encouraging them to explore the curriculum in greater depth, having worked for many years in a system which encouraged challenging high attainers by moving them on. There is a substantial professional development need here, which will undoubtedly be picked up by the private sector, but of which the Department should be aware.
- Finally, we have encountered understandable confusion among heads and teachers about how a curriculum and assessment model based around mastery and 'going deeper' fits alongside an accountability model that prioritises progress. It would be helpful for the Department to provide guidance on this.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply.	X
E-mail address for acknowledgement:	

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, please confirm below if you would be willing to be contacted again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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All DfE public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office [Principles on Consultation](#)

The key Consultation Principles are:

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and use real discussion with affected parties and experts as well as the expertise of civil service learning to make well informed decisions
- departments should explain what responses they have received and how these have been used in formulating policy
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.

If you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Aileen Shaw, DfE Consultation Coordinator, tel: 0370 000 2288 / email: aileen.shaw@education.gsi.gov.uk

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed responses should be sent to the address shown below by 18 December 2014

Send by e-mail to: PerformanceDescriptor.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk