Assessments
Attitudes of UK Teachers & Parents

A report prepared by BritainThinks

20 June 2016
Background and methodology

BritainThinks conducted an online survey of 506 respondents between 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 15\textsuperscript{th} June 2016, breaking down as:

**256 Parents**
- All with children aged 4-18
- With a spread of those with primary and secondary school children
- Good mix of genders and regional spread across England

**200 Teachers**
- All engaged in teaching full-time (i.e. no TAs or student teachers)
- Equally split across primary and secondary school education
- Good regional spread across England

**50 Head teachers**
- All employed at head teacher / deputy head teacher / principal level
- Equally split across primary and secondary school education
- Good regional spread across England

Please note that the sample size for head teachers in particular is relatively small and as such subgroup differences should be treated as indicative rather than definitive.
Summary of background attitudes

1. Assessments, testing and examinations are perceived to be one of the top issues facing the education sector. This concern is shared by parents and teachers alike.

2. Spontaneous associations with testing and assessments are much more likely to be negative than positive, with both teachers and parents associating assessments strongly with ‘stress’ and ‘pressure’.

3. When asked what are the specific issues with testing and assessments, teachers in particular describe concern about the ‘culture’ of testing and assessments having a negative impact on teachers and students. Parents are less likely than teachers to identify this challenge.

4. Evaluation of teacher performance being too closely tied to tests and assessments is not teachers’ most front of mind concern when they think about tests and assessments. However, when asked outright, there is very strong agreement among teachers that the evaluation of teacher performance is too closely tied to tests and assessments.
Tests, assessments and examinations are second most likely to be selected as one of the top issues facing the education sector

- Second to teacher workload (mentioned by 36% of respondents as one their top two issues for the sector)
- Just ahead of funding cuts to schools (mentioned by 30% of respondents as one of their top issues for the sector)
This concern is shared by both the teacher and parent audiences surveyed

- Teachers and parents are more or less equally likely to select tests, assessments and examinations as one of their top two issues for the sector.

- In contrast, there are big divergences between teachers and parents in levels of concern about teacher workload, funding cuts and class sizes.

Q3: What do you think are the main issues facing education in England? This could be from first-hand experience of the education sector, or from your impressions or media coverage. Please select up to two issues. Base: All teacher respondents including head teachers (n=250) and parent respondents (n=250)

Teacher Responses vs Parent Responses

- % of Teachers Selecting as a Primary or Secondary Issue
- % of Parents Selecting as a Primary or Secondary Issue

- Teacher workload
- Tests, assessments and examinations
- Funding cuts to schools
- Attracting high quality teachers to the profession
- Changes to the school curriculum
- School performance and accountability
- Class sizes
- Other
- School inspections
- Don't know
But head teachers are slightly less likely than teachers overall to select tests, assessments and examinations as one of their top issues

- A quarter of head teachers surveyed select tests, assessments and examinations as one of their top two issues for the education sector.

- However, head teachers are more likely to prioritise school performance and accountability as an issue for the sector.

Q3: What do you think are the main issues facing education in England? This could be from first-hand experience of the education sector, or from your impressions or media coverage. Please select up to two issues. Base: All head teacher respondents (n=50) and all non-head teacher respondents (n=200)
Spontaneous associations with assessments tend to be negative

- Common themes across the parent and teacher audiences relate to stress and pressure, the number and difficulty of assessments

Q4: When you think about testing, assessments and examinations in schools in England specifically, what are the first three words or phrases that come to mind? Base: All respondents including parents and teachers (506)
Among parents only, the themes of pressure and stress continue to dominate. But there is greater emphasis on the difficulty of assessments among parents. Associations including ‘hard’ and ‘difficult’ grow significantly in prominence when looking at the parent audience only.
Teachers only are also most likely to associate assessments with stress and pressure

- But teachers are more likely than parents alone to focus on the number of assessments compared to parents, and the value of those assessments
  - With associations including '(too) much', '(too) many' and 'excessive' growing in prominence
  - As do associations including 'unnecessary' and 'pointless'
  - A small proportion of teachers mention 'targets' spontaneously when thinking about assessments

Q4: When you think about testing, assessments and examinations in schools in England specifically, what are the first three words or phrases that come to mind? Base: All teacher respondents only (n=250)
When asked about specific issues related to testing, respondents are most concerned that tests ‘do not reflect students’ achievements’

- The ‘impact of the culture of testing on the quality of teaching’ is second most likely to be selected as the top issue related to assessments (with 38% of all respondents selecting it as among their top two issues)
- The ‘use of tests and assessments to evaluate teacher performance’ is, comparatively, less likely to be mentioned (at 21%)

### Assessments Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>% Selecting as a Primary Issue</th>
<th>% Selecting as a Secondary Issue</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tests and assessments not being a fair measurement of students' real achievements</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of the culture of testing and assessment on the quality of teaching</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<td>Students starting tests, assessment and examinations at too young an age</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students taking too many tests</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of tests and assessments to evaluate teacher performance</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tests, assessments and examinations becoming too difficult</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests, assessments and examinations becoming too easy</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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Percentage of Total Respondents Selecting Each Issue

*Total 47%*
Teachers are much more likely than parents to be concerned about the impact of the ‘culture’ of testing on the quality of teaching

- The impact of this growing ‘culture’ of testing is more likely to be selected by teachers as the top specific issue relating to assessments (56%)
- Teachers are, unsurprisingly, also much more likely than parents to be concerned about the use of testing to evaluate teacher performance
- This option is the third most likely to be selected from the list by teachers

Q5: Some people say that ‘tests, assessments and examinations’ are one of the main issues facing education in England. What do you think are the most important concerns related to tests, assessments and examinations that make this an issue for the education sector? Please select up to two issues. Base: All teacher respondents including head teachers (n=250) and parent respondents (n=250)
This finding is consistent across the head teacher and wider teacher sample

- Within the teacher sample, secondary school teachers are slightly more likely than primary school teachers to select ‘the impact of the culture of testing and assessment on the quality of teaching’ as the top issue related to assessments (60% compared to 52%)

- Secondary teachers are also more likely than primary school teachers to select ‘the use of tests and assessments to evaluate teacher performance as the top testing-related issue (34% vs 26%)

Q5: Some people say that ‘tests, assessments and examinations’ are one of the main issues facing education in England. What do you think are the most important concerns related to tests, assessments and examinations that make this an issue for the education sector? Please select up to two issues. Base: All head teacher respondents (n=50) and all non-head teacher respondents (n=200)
There is strong agreement among both parents and teachers that the ‘culture of testing’ is having a negative impact on teachers and students.

I think we need fewer but better tests to effectively measure students' achievements  
12%  8%  80%

The ‘culture’ of testing and assessments is making the teaching profession more stressful and less rewarding  
12%  8%  79%

The ‘culture’ of testing and assessments in schools is negatively affecting students’ ability to think creatively and enjoy a range of ways of learning  
18%  7%  75%

The first ever test was designed by a teacher. Testing and assessments have always been part of how teachers teach and learners learn  
21%  18%  61%

It is important to have testing and assessments to hold teachers and schools to account for their performance and the quality of education they provide  
41%  7%  51%

There is no way of ensuring quality education in schools without testing and assessments  
45%  10%  45%

In the end, the benefits of testing in terms of measuring progress and making schools accountable outweigh the negative impacts  
50%  12%  38%

Q9: Below are a number of things that have been said about testing, assessments and examinations in English schools. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each argument? Base: All respondents (n=506)
And (at 9 in 10) the vast majority of teachers say that their evaluation is too dependent on students’ test results

| Evaluation of teacher performance is too heavily reliant on how students perform in tests and assessments | 7% Net Disagree | 91% Net Agree |
| Testing, assessments and examinations are a source of stress in my job | 12% Net Disagree | 86% Net Agree |
| My school tends to focus its attention and resources more on year groups who are taking an official test, assessment or examination that year than those who are not | 28% Net Disagree | 67% Net Agree |
| My head teacher places a lot of pressure on me when it comes to the performance of my students in official tests and assessments | 29% Net Disagree | 66% Net Agree |
| I am concerned that I may be passing stress about tests and assessments onto my students | 37% Net Disagree | 59% Net Agree |
| I tend to focus my attention more on year groups who are taking an official test, assessment or examination that year than those who are not | 39% Net Disagree | 54% Net Agree |

While a significant proportion disagree that this is the case (37%), almost 3 in 5 teachers say that they are concerned that they may be passing stress about tests and assessments onto their students.