

# Testing the Water: Exploring the role of assessment in teaching

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## Why are we running a consultation on assessment?

### Assessment is a key concern for teachers and parents the sector

Assessment, testing and exams are perceived by teachers and parents alike to be one of the top issues facing the education sector. For teachers and school leaders assessment is the second most pressing concern facing education, behind workload.<sup>1, 2</sup> For parents, only funding cuts to schools is a bigger issue.<sup>3</sup>

Pearson's 2016 survey of teachers' and parents' attitudes towards assessment reveals widespread support for a cross-sector debate to address some of the challenges relating to testing and assessment. Pearson and LKMco therefore believe they have a role to play in facilitating this debate and helping find solutions. They are therefore launching **an in-depth, consultation with teachers, school leaders, experts and parents to better understand concerns about assessment and to identify ways of addressing them**. We are using the questions below as a starting point but will refine them as our work progresses. Where appropriate we will also explore what we can learn from other countries.

The questions, below, draw on a longer stimulus paper prepared as the basis of this consultation by Professor Peter Hill, a leading expert in international assessment systems, and on Pearson's 2016 survey.

The consultation will run between December 2016 and June 2017, with an interim report published in Spring 2017. **The goal is to set out potential ways forward that could improve assessment in England and beyond.**

*To find out more or get involved in the consultation email [info@lkmco.org](mailto:info@lkmco.org) or tweet @LKMco #TestingTheWater*

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<sup>1</sup> BritainThinks, on behalf of Pearson (2016) *Assessments Attitudes of UK Teachers and Parents*. In June 2016 BritainThinks conducted a survey for Pearson of 506 teachers, headteachers and parents. The random sample had good spread across the country and comprised: 256 parents, all with children aged between 4 and 18; 200 fulltime teachers, and; 50 headteachers.

<sup>2</sup> The Key, *State of Education Survey Report 2016*. The survey reports on a sample of over 2,000 school leaders and governors, who placed 'internal assessment post-levels' and 'preparing for new performance measures' just behind teacher workload as the most pressing issues facing the sector.

<sup>3</sup> BritainThinks, on behalf of Pearson (2016) *Assessments Attitudes of UK Teachers and Parents*.

## What are the main issues we will be exploring?

### Negative perceptions

Views of assessment, particularly where younger children are involved, tend to be negative. Spontaneous associations with assessment and testing are much more likely to be negative than positive, with teachers and parents alike linking them with stress and pressure. On balance, teachers and parents feel negatively about testing and assessment in schools, but tests for older pupils including GCSEs and A-levels are much more likely to be viewed positively.<sup>4</sup>

A sizeable minority (47%) of teachers and parents feel tests and assessments do not provide a fair measurement of students' real achievements.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, many do not feel their children are adequately prepared for assessments and tests (34% of primary parents and 38% secondary parents say their child seemed 'well prepared' during their last assessment and testing period).

Unfortunately, primary school leaders do not believe that new accountability systems will be an improvement in terms of accurately reflecting their school's performance. On the other hand, secondary school leaders are more positive about the new Attainment and Progress 8 measures.<sup>6</sup>

**Attitudes to assessment**

- a. Are teachers' negative attitudes towards assessment inevitable, or could this change? If so, how?
- b. Why do teachers and parents feel more negatively about some forms of assessment than others? What can we do about this?
- c. What explains parents' belief that their children are not adequately prepared for assessments and tests? How could this be improved?
- d. What might be done in the longer term to resolve tensions between the validity, reliability and credibility of assessment?

<sup>4</sup> BritainThinks, on behalf of Pearson (2016) *Assessments Attitudes of UK Teachers and Parents*.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The Key, *State of Education Survey Report 2016*.



### **Conflicting functions**

There are tensions between the purposes served by assessment. At present there is a lack of balance between assessments' formative and accountability functions.<sup>7</sup>

Assessment forms a critical part of the learning process, providing information about what pupils do and do not know and understand. However, test data is also used to hold teachers and schools to account.<sup>8</sup> Over half (56%) of teachers feel that the 'culture' of testing has a negative impact on the quality of their teaching, and some feel it distorts the curriculum. Nine in ten teachers say that their performance evaluation is too dependent on students' results.<sup>9</sup>

### **The purpose of assessment**

- e. Could we redress the balance between assessment for learning, assessment for accountability and assessment for qualifications?

### **The challenges of expertise and capacity**

Teachers' capacity and expertise can affect their willingness and ability to conduct assessment.<sup>10</sup> What is more, the current round of exam reform, including the reduced role of teacher assessment and the simultaneous shift towards terminal assessments, have in part been motivated by a perceived lack of reliability and fairness across the system.

### **Assessment in practice**

- f. What should teachers' role in assessment be?
- g. How can we make assessment (particularly formative assessment) more efficient and effective? Can technology help?
- h. Whose responsibility is innovation in assessment?

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<sup>7</sup> Hill, P. (2016) *Stimulus Paper* (internal document for Pearson).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> BritainThinks, on behalf of Pearson (2016) *Assessments Attitudes of UK Teachers and Parents*.

<sup>10</sup> Hill, P. (2016) *Stimulus Paper* (internal document for Pearson).





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