

## **Position paper to clarify changes for schools**

### **Introduction**

1. This paper sets out how the Department intends to move forward with statutory end-of-key-stage assessment, building upon the useful dialogue that has taken place over the last eighteen months with NIC-ICTU (NI Committee – Irish Congress of Trade Unions), and enabling both sides to provide clarity for schools.

### **Rationale**

2. The main purpose of end of key stage assessment is to provide parents with information as to how their child is doing at school. This happens at three key points in a pupil's school life (Year 4, Year 7 and Year 10). We also need to know that the school is doing a good job for our children. The teachers' assessment of a child's progress (in the core skills of Communication and Using Mathematics) is also reported to the Department. This information lets the Department know **very broadly** whether our school system is serving our children well. It also helps to inform the Education and Library Boards and CCMS about how the school is getting on. For the past two years teacher unions have instructed their members not to be a part of these assessments. They have sought to withhold that information – many of them withholding it from the Department, a few even withholding it from parents. The Department believes that this industrial action is against the best interests of children and their parents.

### **Progress to date**

3. It is important to recognise the extent to which the assessment arrangements (in particular, the moderation process – the process by which the levels reported are quality assured by working teachers employed by CCEA) have already been changed in response to the expressed concerns of the NIC-ICTU.
4. Initially concerns were raised about the workload involved in collating evidence for moderation, and about the schedule for the reporting of Levels in mid-March. CCEA and Departmental officials consulted with representatives throughout

2012/13, making a number of changes to the arrangements, including the amendment of the supplementary guidance prior to issuing to schools last year.

5. Following the review of the first year of the arrangements, the Department again engaged with NIC-ICTU and reflected their concerns in revisions to the arrangements for 2013/14, including:
  - a. delaying the assessment of Using ICT for at least a year to allow assessment of Communications and Using Mathematics to bed in further;
  - b. responding to positive views on school standardisation by redesigning the moderation model to a “2-step” process, so that there is an initial internal standardisation stage based upon a school portfolio, significantly reducing the need for schools to provide pupil portfolios at step 2. This is evidenced by the very small number of schools involved in the step 2 process this year (Primary: Communication, 5 schools from 126 – approx 4%; Using Maths, 24 schools from 93 – approx 26%. Post-primary: Communication, 7 schools from 49 – approx 14%; Using Maths, 6 schools from 51 – approx 12%)
  - c. recognising the impact upon teachers’ workloads at a busy time of year by moving the return date for the reporting of pupil outcomes from mid-March to mid-May – giving schools eight weeks longer;
  - d. emphasising the primacy of teachers’ professional judgement and underlining the purpose of moderation in developing teachers’ confidence in assessing against Levels by removing the requirement for in-year changes to reported Levels; and
  - e. emphasising the primary purpose of the arrangements to support teaching and learning (not to measure school or system performance) and the supportive nature of feedback.
  
6. Generous teacher substitution arrangements have been put in place for the completion of the assessment process (DE Circular 2014/03). In addition, in 2013/14 the Department provided up to two additional days of substitute cover per school where schools felt there was a need for further teacher release, for example, to support internal standardisation.

7. It is to be regretted that, despite these changes and a commitment to ongoing engagement with the teaching unions as the arrangements evolve, the directive on industrial action has remained in place. While the Department has continued to engage in 2013/14 with a view to understanding and, if possible, addressing the remaining concerns, in the interests of clarity and certainty for schools, a final policy position is now being put in place so that schools have clarity on the way forward in time for the new school year. We will continue to work on areas where operational improvements can be made in partnership with teachers and their representatives but the main assessment process will remain as set out below.
8. It has always been understood that the assessment arrangements would continue to be reviewed over time, and that they could be expected to be developed in light of experience. Indeed, our participation in the OECD<sup>1</sup> review of Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks was based in part upon our desire to ensure that our assessment arrangements were developed in light of external expertise and observation. This paper, therefore, should be seen in the context of the ongoing evolution of the arrangements and the Department's response to the 2013/14 OECD report.
9. The OECD Report and our own consultation with schools has illustrated that there are significant benefits to the use of the Levels of Progression, as a tool in support of teaching and learning. These benefits, however, can only be realised if effective moderation is in place to instil confidence in the process of assessment for learning. Schools have made absolutely clear their view that moderation ensures equity and consistency and teachers have indicated that they attach considerable importance to this. It is regrettable that TUS has been unable to support the OECD's endorsement of key features of the arrangements.
10. Discussions with NIC-ICTU to date on other aspects have, however, been fruitful and common ground has been agreed in a number of areas. These include:

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<http://www.oecd.org/education/school/Reviews%20of%20Evaluation%20and%20Assessment%20in%20Education%20Northern%20Ireland.pdf>

- a) acceptance that assessment, both summative and formative, is a core element of the work of all teachers and is an integral part of high-quality learning and teaching;
- b) endorsement of an approach that retains teacher judgement at the heart of the assessment process and includes a focus on supporting teachers in undertaking assessment practice;
- c) recognition of the need for assessment to be designed for and made against our curriculum, particularly the assessment of skills;
- d) agreement that the assessment of the cross-curricular skills in the curriculum is only one aspect of pupil assessment by teachers, but is – uniquely – reported centrally, reflecting the criticality of these skills to all learning;
- e) acknowledgement that schools are accountable to Boards of Governors for their pupils' outcomes, and to parents for individual pupil outcomes, and assessment data must be available to them for this purpose;
- f) recognition that managing authorities (ELBs, CCMS) require school-level data, including assessment data against the Levels of Progression, in order to fulfil their performance management roles effectively;
- g) understanding that managing authorities may reasonably use school-level LoP assessment data as one of a number of high-level indicators that may trigger interest in a more thorough examination of performance across a wider range of measures;
- h) acceptance that, likewise, ETI requires this data in order to fulfil its inspection role effectively;
- i) appreciation that many schools are using a wide range of data available to them (particularly purchased assessments) in an increasingly sophisticated way; managing authorities and ETI should make use of the wealth of data in their roles, and DE acknowledges and supports this; and
- j) agreement that DE has a need to evaluate performance of the education system at the highest level.

11. Our discussions with stakeholders identified three main areas where concerns remained:

- a) the use of KS data for Accountability and Performance Management purposes;
- b) the fitness for purpose of the Levels of Progression; and
- c) the workload associated with moderation.

12. The remainder of this paper sets out the Department's final policy position in respect of these issues, from 2014-15 onwards under these three headings.

**(a) Accountability / Performance Management**

13. In respect of evaluating performance at a system level rather than at school level, the Department recognises that a measurement based upon the performance of all pupils in all schools is not the only acceptable model. It would be possible to design a system-level measurement that was based on a different data set. **The Department will examine the feasibility of changing its arrangements for monitoring the percentage of pupils achieving at or above the expected level at the end of each Key Stage through using an anonymised, stratified sample of schools' returns to CCEA rather than a full set of data broken down by individual schools.**

14. The range of assessments used in schools for the benefit of teaching and learning has a role to play in a broader performance management context and to ignore it in school evaluation is to ignore a rich source of data. **The Department will undertake research this financial year to assess the extent to which the commercial-assessment tools available to schools here fit with and appropriately assess the knowledge and skills requirements of our curriculum. It will also undertake work in FY 2015/16 (and ideally before), informed by that research, to identify how best to support schools in using the data from appropriate assessment tools as part of their ongoing performance management arrangements with their governors and /or employing authority.**

15. In respect of in-school performance management and accountability to parents and governors, and in light of the OECD's reporting on school evaluation, the

Department has begun work to look at how schools might routinely provide a wider range of information (a 'dashboard' of measures) for the purposes of performance accountability, and how greater engagement with and understanding of school performance data and its context might be encouraged and supported. **As previously indicated, the Department will consult extensively with stakeholders during the process of developing a suitable dashboard of measures for reporting performance at individual school level.**

16. It is worth re-stating that individual schools' 'performance' at KS1, KS2 and KS3 as measured by LoPs is not high stakes *per se*; it is not and should not be used by the Department or anyone else (managing authorities, ETI or Governors) in isolation for performance management or accountability purposes. The Department has identified that there is an inconsistent understanding of this message across the system and that teacher representative bodies have a role to play, alongside the Department and its NDPBs, in stressing the position. **All concerned have an urgent need to clarify this as part of a wider communication on the purpose of the assessment arrangements.**

17. The Department will continue to reference school-level performance as measured by Levels of Progression for discrete purposes, including the prioritisation of targeted resources, and as part of a range of data that enable us to examine the profile of individual schools.

#### **(b) Levels of Progression**

18. There has been some criticism that the Levels themselves are too broad and there is confusion as to their purpose(s). In addition, the OECD recommended that the Levels are re-examined to ensure that their primary purpose is defined and understood and that they fulfil their role within the assessment arrangements.

19. The 2006 legislation that brought in the revised Curriculum stated that assessment arrangements to support it should be 'set in place as soon as is practicable'. It also specified Levels of Progression for the cross-curricular skills of Communication, Using Maths and Using ICT. Assessment arrangements fully

aligned to the focus of our Curriculum on skills as well as knowledge were introduced for the first time in 2012/13.

20. The Levels of Progression replaced the previous Levels of Attainment to ensure they are aligned to our curriculum. In particular:

- they place more emphasis on pupils being able to use and apply their knowledge and skills in a range of contexts, both across the curriculum and in practical, real life situations;
- they are in the form of bulleted “can do” statements, so there is more focus on pupils’ competence; and
- they form a continuum across the phases of education, making it possible to track individuals’ progress, and providing an appropriate progression into skills qualifications at Key Stage 4 and beyond.

21. The Levels represent a unique framework, designed for our Curriculum, for the discussion and agreement of standards both within and between schools. For assessment to be effective, there needs to be a shared understanding of the standards against which pupils are to be assessed and the new Levels of Progression fulfil this function. They set out clear statements of the knowledge and skills we expect pupils to have acquired and developed at certain key points in their compulsory education (end of KS1, KS2 and KS3).

22. They were not designed to replace assessment frameworks for individual lessons, sequences of lessons or the resulting work produced by pupils but to provide a complementary framework designed mainly for summative purposes at the key stages outlined above.

23. At the end of KS2 and KS3, parents can compare the level achieved with the level achieved in the previous key stage. This helps them to understand whether their child has reached the expected standard for his or her age, is working towards or performing above the expected standard. It is also a useful indicator of how the school is supporting a child’s progress.

24. **DE and CCEA will work with stakeholders and practitioners in 2014/15 AY, on how the use of the Levels and associated support can be improved to ensure that they fulfil their primary role as tools for teaching and learning.**

25. In response to the criticism that parents do not yet understand the significance of reported Levels, it is acknowledged that reporting Levels to parents might be more effective if there was less emphasis placed on the “number” and more on the underlying statements setting out what a pupil can be expected to do.. **The Department will develop guidance for schools, enabling them to report to parents using the language of the Levels.**

26. In support of the effective use of Levels, participation in moderation should continue to be undertaken to support teachers in developing their practice of assessment and should be considered part of a teacher’s continuous professional development. In response to feedback from schools, the Department has identified scope to encourage clustering of schools to facilitate professional dialogue and share good practice in assessment of Levels. **The Department will ensure that the moderation arrangements are developed further to include clustering of schools so that there is a balance between professional dialogue and the robustness in moderation that must be maintained if schools are to have confidence in both the process and the outcomes.**

### **(c) Moderation**

27. It has been generally accepted that the two-step model adopted for 2014/15, with its greater focus on internal standardisation and supportive feedback, was a significant step towards addressing the NIC-ICTU concerns around workload.

28. The workshops held with school representatives in April 2014, highlighted a number of remaining issues. The Department’s position on these is as follows:

- a. In line with the proposals in the paragraph above, **DE will develop the Step 2 moderation process for schools through the use of professional dialogue and the clustering of schools for moderation.**



CCEA will endeavour to facilitate school visits as far as possible in 2014/15 but these may have to be supplemented by a combination of local / cluster moderation and feedback by telephone / on-line for those who prefer that format.

- b. **DE will oversee advice provided by CCEA on a range of practical evidence arising from ongoing classwork that could be presented in support of reported Levels at Step 2 moderation.** There will, however, need to be realism about what can be delivered in 2014/15.
  
- c. **Primary and post-primary schools will be able to draw from a wider range of tasks provided by CCEA, and will be free to use CCEA-designed tasks rather than their own.** In line with the recommendations of the OECD, teachers who have developed their own tasks and are prepared to make their tasks available to other schools could provide their tasks to CCEA to make available *via* a central portal. Once again, we need to be realistic about delivering this in full for 2014/15.
  
- d. Schools have expressed concern at the prospect of the introduction of statutory assessment of Levels of Progression for Using ICT, both in terms of the workload implications when placed alongside the on-going roll-out of Communication and Using Mathematics, and schools' technical capacity to deliver effectively, given that the C2K transformation process is bedding-in. As outlined last year, **the Department is prepared to place formal / statutory assessment of UICT using Levels of Progression on hold for one further year, whilst CCEA conducts a review of the content of the UICT skill.**

## **Conclusion**

29. The Department remains committed to the assessment of pupils against our Curriculum, using Levels of Progression that allow for assessment of competence with reference to an expected level. It recognises that the introduction of new assessment arrangements has proven disruptive, and is conscious that misapprehensions about the potential use of assessment data can have the

effect of distorting what would otherwise be good professional practice in assessment.

30. It is the Department's view that the assessment arrangements do not need to be redesigned from first principles but, reflecting the views of the OECD, that we have a solid basis upon which to build. There remains a task of securing professional confidence in the value of assessing against Levels, in the consistency with which Levels are assessed, and in the use to which school-level data is put in performance management and accountability arrangements.
  
31. This final policy paper sets out the Departmental position, informed by extensive prior discussion with teachers and with TUS. We have all come a long way over the past two years. Assessment arrangements have developed over that time in line with our discussions and we owe it to the teaching profession and to the pupils and their parents affected by this critical policy to move forward together.

### **What we have done to date:**

1. Redesigned the moderation model to a “2-step” process, focusing on supporting internal standardisation and significantly reducing the need for schools to provide pupil portfolios at step 2.
2. Moved the return date for reporting pupil outcomes from mid-March to mid-May.
3. Removed the requirement for in-year changes to reported Levels.
4. Emphasised the primary purpose of the arrangements to support teaching and learning (not to measure school or system performance) and the supportive nature of feedback.
5. Delayed the assessment of Using ICT in the school year 2013/14 to allow assessment of Communications and Using Mathematics to bed in further.
6. Provided up to two days of substitute cover for 2013/14 in addition to the existing teacher substitution arrangements.

### **From 2014/15 we will<sup>2</sup>:**

1. Examine the feasibility of changing our arrangements for monitoring the % of pupils achieving at or above the expected level at the end of each Key Stage through using an anonymised, stratified sample of schools’ returns to CCEA rather than a full set of data broken down by individual schools.
2. Commission independent research this financial year to assess the extent to which the commercial-assessment tools available to schools here fit with and appropriately assess the knowledge and skills requirements of our curriculum.
3. Develop a dashboard of measures for allowing schools to report their own performance, ensuring that this incorporates a range of measures and after consultation with teachers and their representatives.
4. Change the moderation arrangements: moving away incrementally from schools sending in their portfolios towards facilitated meetings of clusters of schools. This

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<sup>2</sup> Subject to resources

will focus, not on checking up on schools, but on providing professional development opportunities to build teachers' confidence in their judgements of the levels achieved and in the overall consistency and fairness of the system as a whole.

5. Provide a wider range of practical evidence arising from ongoing class-work that can be presented in support of reported Levels at Step 2 (moderation). CCEA will also consider alternatives for Step 2 Moderation including moderation support visits.
6. Review the existing bank of CCEA tasks and develop additional tasks that schools will be able to use for assessment purposes.
7. Take forward a proposal to create a 'Central Portal' where schools can share their assessment tasks with other schools.
8. Identify how best to support schools in using the data from appropriate assessment tools as part of their ongoing performance management arrangements with their governors and / or employing authority, including a re-examination of how, why and when the Department issues and publishes data.
9. Work with stakeholders and practitioners in 2014/15 on how the use of the Levels and associated support can be improved to ensure that they fulfill their primary role as tools for teaching and learning.
10. Work with teachers and their representatives to communicate the purpose of the assessment arrangements.
11. Place formal moderation of statutory assessment of UICT using Levels of Progression on hold for one more year although schools will be able to choose from a number of options in 2014/15 to build upon their understanding and confidence of UICT.