Assessment Discussion Paper

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on current assessment policy, taking account of the changing context, and to suggest issues for consideration and discussion.

The paper focuses primarily on end-of-key-stage assessment of cross-curricular skills. However, it also argues that policy in this area might be considered in the broader context of other ongoing reviews of the legislative context for assessment, such as the DE policy review of computer-based assessments and the DE consultation exercise re revising existing legislation for reporting, target setting and school prospectus.

Summary

- Since initiation of curriculum review in 2000, CCEA has given consideration to how a revised, skills-focused curriculum can be assessed. Whilst there has been general consistency in the direction of travel throughout, it has been a challenge to define the best way to achieve this, and to balance assessment for learning, assessment of learning and assessment for accountability providing data for analysis of system performance.
- The key principles which have underpinned these considerations and CCEA advice include: the importance of assessment for learning and ongoing assessment within the classroom; the need to track pupil progression; the importance of building professional competence and confidence in assessment practices; the need for quality assurance measures; and consideration of a separate sampling system to assess performance of the system.
- The key principles of assessment have now been codified in the Department's *Count, Read: Succeed* strategy. These include: the need for assessment to reflect the curriculum; the importance of literacy and numeracy skills; the central role of teachers in the classroom; and the need for accountability and performance measures.

- Development of assessment has taken place in a changing context, with an increased focus on accountability, school improvement and effective use of data, particularly since the publication of *Every School a Good School* (ESaGS). This has changed the emphasis of the arrangements.
- This time is a point of transition, which creates challenges and opportunities.
- It is timely to take stock of progress to date and to consider the best way forward.

- Schools have identified issues with the assessment arrangements currently being implemented. These include queries around the principles of levels of progression, alignment with classroom practice and workload implications.
- Concerns have been expressed about how and for what purpose educational assessments are used. Using outcomes from educational assessment for a range of purposes (and audiences) can lead to unintended consequences and behaviours, particularly if the contexts are or are perceived to be 'high stakes'.

- If a range of inferences are to be drawn about performance in general terms, then measures need to be robust. The current arrangements are built on this premise.

- Given its subjective nature, teacher assessment presents challenges in achieving a consistent, reliable measure, particularly if teachers feel under pressure to produce 'good' results. Measures to validate that standards are being applied consistently within and between schools requires sampling. This inevitably requires collation of assessment outcomes as evidence of how standards have been applied.
- It is unwise to draw too many inferences from any one measure (teacher assessment or test), particularly if that measure has been designed for a purpose different from the inference.

- Consideration should be given to an assessment/accountability framework which recognises the position of established measures within the framework, but which uses a range of quantitative and qualitative information and which shifts the focus of accountability to effective governance.
- CCEA suggests that consideration is given to an action plan drawing together those elements of policy review which are already ongoing (computer-based assessment, end-of-key-stage assessment, reporting, target setting and related legislation, the role and nature of qualifications) to agree a way forward.
- Consideration should be given to what flexibility can be provided within the system in the short term (in terms of schools' statutory obligations) to allow new practices to embed and debate to take place.

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is:

- to consider the changing context within which assessment is delivered;
- to recognise the challenges faced by assessment policy at this time;
- to review the key principles of assessment; and
- to stimulate discussion on the future of assessment policy and to propose some options for consideration.

The paper also contains three appendices:

- Appendix 1 provides an overview of the development of assessment advice since 2000.
- Appendix 2 provides an overview of the development of the Levels of Progression.
- Appendix 3 considers options in relation to computer-based assessment.

The Changing Context

A new, revised curriculum has been introduced to Northern Ireland, phased in since 2007, and revised assessment arrangements are required to support this new curriculum. However, the context for assessment has shifted since this time. This includes an increasing emphasis on accountability, school self-evaluation and school improvement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy, with the launch of the *Every School a Good School* strategy. It also includes increasing concerns in schools about the uses to which assessment data may be put, particularly in a period of close scrutiny on the sustainability of schools and real and perceived competition between schools. There have also been recent challenges to confidence in assessment and qualifications systems, such as the questioning of the currency and comparability of the GCSE/GCE 'brand'. The period has also led to a more sophisticated use of assessment and other data by schools for the purposes of self-evaluation and the improvement of pupil outcomes.

It is also recognised that this year has been difficult for the introduction of the new assessment arrangements. While comprehensive training programmes have been in place and generally well received, schools' confidence has been knocked by the pace of change, the introduction of new providers for computer-based assessments (CBAs) and end-of-key-stage arrangements in the same year, the technical difficulties encountered with CBAs, uncertainties about the legislative status and operational detail of the moderation arrangements, combined with ongoing concerns about teachers' workload.

This year is a key point of transition in terms of policy:
- The new end-of-key-stage assessments have been introduced into schools, but the Minister has requested that CCEA carries out a review of their operation in the summer term 2013.
- The Department is currently carrying out a policy review of computer-based assessments (recommendations due June 2013).
- The Department recently carried out a consultation exercise on the legislation for reporting, target setting and school prospectuses, with a view to revising the existing legislation.

- A review of GCSE and GCE qualifications is currently underway.

This period of change and transition presents many challenges and opportunities. It is a crucial time to consider the key principles which underpin the proposed changes to assessment arrangements, to question if these still hold and, if they do, what are the best means by which those principles can be achieved.

The purpose of this paper is to stimulate debate and propose some options for consideration.

The Journey to Date: A Brief Overview

The following presents a brief overview of assessment development. A more detailed overview and timeline of the development of assessment advice and policy may be found in *Appendix 1*.

Curriculum Review

Review and revision of the NI Curriculum began in 2000, and consideration of assessment has been a key element since then. In the 2001 *Report on First Consultation*, it was noted that 'primary respondents urged the need for a concurrent review of assessment' and that 'the majority of primary respondents indicated that they did not value the outcomes of Key Stage Assessment, especially with massive funding shortages in the primary sector.'

The CCEA proposals of April 2002 included a focus on teacher assessment of Literacy, Numeracy, ICT and Critical and Creative Thinking with reference to the level scale, supported by a rolling programme of moderation.

In its advice of January 2003, CCEA proposed that statutory annual reporting would replace the end of key stage assessments. The report would be based on a review of formative assessments at the end of each year, using a common scale throughout the primary stage to record progress and achievement. One issue identified, which was referred to frequently by teachers in the consultation, was the need to standardise assessment within and across schools. CCEA acknowledged the need for "robust" and "rigorous" arrangements and proposed three key elements to moderation:
- Assessment training in which standards would be set and in which teachers could use exemplar materials to establish benchmarks for attainment.
- Provision of good quality exemplar materials by CCEA linked to teaching plans and schemes of work.
- A supportive, on-going "formative" approach to moderation, based on a rolling three-year programme, with a view to developing electronic pupil portfolios so that the process could be carried out remotely and feedback to teachers be almost immediate.

In its advice, CCEA also proposed the possibility of monitoring standards through a sampling approach similar to that operating in Scotland.

In her response of August 2003, the Minister at the time stated that 'assessment arrangements should also promote common standards amongst teachers, and common expectations of progression. They

should enable meaningful information to be provided to parents, and allow Government to judge how the system, and schools within it, are doing.' While she accepted that moderation, like assessment, should be formative in nature, the process of training in effective assessment for learning needed to be viewed as a separate process from the process of moderation. In a further letter of June 2004, the Minister emphasised that there needed to be 'a high level of consistency, through appropriate moderation and/or the use of common assessment materials'.

Legislation

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 established the statutory basis for the assessment arrangements, as it provided for the assessment of the Cross-Curricular Skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT with reference to levels of progression. This was followed by The Education (Assessment Arrangements) (Foundation to Key Stage 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007.

Assessment and Moderation Development

In December 2007 the Department of Education (DE) requested detailed advice from CCEA on revised assessment arrangements for formal assessment at each key stage. This advice was to include 'proposals for robust moderation'.

CCEA presented initial advice in July 2009. Following further consultation with principals, ETI and the Northern Ireland Teaching Council (NITC), the broad principles of the statutory assessment arrangements (including the levels of progression) were approved by the Minister and presented to the Assembly Education Committee on 19 May 2010. The Committee briefing was supported by a paper which set out plans for bringing legislative effect to the requirements for revised assessment arrangements to support the curriculum. The paper recognised the professionalism of teachers and the place of assessment within the existing teacher competence model. It set out the role of assessment in the broader legislative and policy context.

In May 2010 CCEA was informed that the Minister had agreed the nature of assessment arrangements and CCEA was commissioned to develop plans to bring effect to these. The plans involved developing detailed advice about 'robust moderation processes'.

In the interim, the Department published its school improvement strategy, *Every School a Good School*, and the associated literacy and numeracy strategy document, *Count, Read: Succeed,* which outlined the purpose and position of assessment and which set system targets for literacy and numeracy.

Evidence from the *Research Report on the Proposed Assessment and Moderation Arrangements for the Northern Ireland Curriculum – CCEA, January 2011* demonstrated that there was a 'lack of confidence in the reliability of outcomes from the current end-of key-stage assessment arrangements (based upon the Levels of Attainment) and that a new system of moderation was important to increase professional confidence in assessment outcomes throughout the primary and post-primary sectors'. A common theme from the research was that a model of teacher based assessment requires a 'rigorous and robust' moderation system 'if confidence is to be increased' in outcomes from Key Stage assessment.

CCEA's 'Advice on Proposals for Assessment Arrangements to Support the NI Curriculum' was presented to the Department in May 2012. In his acceptance of the advice, the Minister made it clear that he expected 'CCEA to continue to explore and develop… other approaches to shortening moderation

timescales as we move through the initial period of implementation, without in any way diluting the commitment to robust moderation'.

This continues to present challenges, as under legislation the annual report to parents must be provided by 30 June. The timescales as they are currently proposed are designed to allow moderation to take place and for feedback to be provided to schools in time for adjustments to be made to the Levels reported to parents.   It will be difficult to identify how these timescales might be shortened without diluting the robustness of the arrangements and in turn, confidence in how standards are being applied; that is, to provide any more confidence than existed in legacy arrangements. For example, one option proposed by teaching unions is a return to legacy arrangements and moderation of a school portfolio earlier in the school year, prior to the making of summative judgements. However, it is unlikely that such a system will command any more confidence than previously; that is, the same process is likely to result in the same outcome.

Key Principles of Assessment

Throughout, the process has been driven by key principles relating to assessment.   These are summarised in the Department's strategy document *Count, Read: Succeed.*

Purpose of Assessment

'Assessment provides information that has a key role in helping schools to improve outcomes. Knowing how pupils are performing allows the school to undertake informed self-evaluation and set meaningful and challenging targets in its School Development Plan. Pupil level information also allows schools to plan for improvements in individual classes, year groups, and then at school level.'

Summative assessment plays an equally important role by:
    a.   allowing schools to monitor the progress of individual pupils;
    b.   keeping parents and pupils informed about the progress that is being made, particularly at important Key Stage transitions; and
    c.   providing important information about the overall effectiveness of our education system in providing pupils with appropriate levels of knowledge and skills in literacy and numeracy.'

> *Count, Read: Succeed. A Strategy to Improve Outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy, DE 2011*

It should also complement the principles and indicators set out in the Education and Training Inspectorate Together *Towards Improvement: A Process for Self-Evaluation* (ETI, 2010) and the professional competences set out in GTCNI's *Teaching: the Reflective Profession*.

Nature of Assessment

Assessment should:
- reflect and support the central role of teachers in classrooms, helping pupils to fulfil their potential;
- complement and support the key aims of the revised curriculum;

- embrace the assessment of skills, knowledge and understanding;
- have a clear and unambiguous focus on literacy and numeracy (and increasingly also on ICT);
- be straightforward and fit for purpose in a way that does not divert professional time and resources away from the core business of teaching and learning and avoid creating perverse incentives; and
- ensure there is appropriate accountability at all levels for the performance of our school system, particularly in relation to outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

Count, Read: Succeed. A Strategy to Improve Outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy, DE 2011

Accountability

'Improving educational outcomes for all young people, and ensuring that those at risk of educational underachievement or who face barriers to learning are supported to reach their full potential, are key priorities for the Department of Education. These priorities are reflected in the ambitious reform programme being taken forward, a programme that includes the implementation and embedding of a revised curriculum and the development of new policy approaches to raising standards, including through Every School a Good School and the Literacy and Numeracy strategy.

It is important that we have a means of testing the effectiveness of our raising standards policies. Assessment has a key role to play both in helping schools to improve outcomes for pupils and in ensuring that the education system is held accountable for the outcomes it delivers with the public expenditure allocated to it.'

Assessment Arrangements to Support the Revised Curriculum:
Briefing Paper for the Education Committee, May 2010

'By its nature, therefore, assessment must have a dual role – it helps teachers and other professionals to improve pupils' learning and to judge their individual progress but it also determines accountability for the quality of teaching and learning and the outcomes that are produced at system level.'

Assessment Arrangements to Support the Revised Curriculum:
Briefing Paper for the Education Committee, May 2010

Whilst it is recognised that assessment outcomes can provide valuable data for accountability, in that context assessment has a dual role. However, if the same assessment is used for more than one purpose, and if one or more of these is considered 'high stakes', unintended and undesirable consequences can result. The use of subjective judgement for 'high stakes' (i.e. accountability) purposes is not recommended if this is to be a key or substantive aspect of consideration.

Assessment is therefore recognised to be operating at various levels (pupil, class, school, system, with a variety of audiences (pupil, teacher, parent, school, system) and for a variety of purposes (to inform learning and teaching, to measure pupil achievement, for school self-evaluation, to make comparisons and to make judgements about school and system performance).

This has implications which are discussed further below in the section 'Current Issues and Challenges'.

Why have teacher assessment and moderation of the Cross-Curricular Skills with reference to Levels of Progression?

Teacher assessment is seen as the most valid way to assess a skills-focused curriculum, as it reflects and supports the central role of teachers in classrooms. It is seen as least intrusive in terms of diverting professional time and resources away from the core business of teaching and learning and can potentially avoid narrowing the curriculum to what can be easily tested.

The Cross-Curricular Skills of literacy and numeracy are a cornerstone of the NI Curriculum as they are 'vital to the success of our children as they progress through school and beyond into further learning, work and life' and are 'key drivers for the future growth of our economy' (Ministerial Foreword to *Count, Read: Succeed*).

Levels of Progression are a development of the legacy levels of attainment, building on the familiar but with an increased focus on the application of skills. They are mapped to the NI Curriculum, providing progression within and across key stages, and are aligned with other skills frameworks, such as essential/basic/key/functional skills, thus allowing for progression into qualifications frameworks.

Moderation is intended to increase professional confidence in assessment outcomes throughout the primary and post-primary sectors, through an external check on the consistency and comparability of outcomes within and between schools.

Current Issues and Challenges

Assessment Arrangements

During system training, consultation and implementation, schools have identified a number of issues with the proposed end-of-key-stage assessment arrangements. Some of these include:

- *The Levels of Progression* are seen as too broad – one level covers too much of a range of abilities and criteria – or as too narrow – the focus on literacy, numeracy and ICT is at the potential expense of a broad and balanced curriculum. The standards are not understood or valued by parents.
- *Teacher Assessment* is perceived as subjective, and misunderstandings have been identified (such as awarding Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2, or reporting 'intended' levels) which can lead to a lack of consistency in the application of standards.
- *External Moderation* requirements are seen as additional to classroom practice, in which the collation of pupil portfolios can create workload implications, and where there are undue time pressures due to the timescales required for the moderation process to take place prior to reporting to parents by 30 June. While internal standardisation is seen as valuable, there are issues in the evidence required for the external moderation of skills, as much of the class-based evidence may be ephemeral in nature, based on teacher observation, and therefore not easily captured in written format. This has the potential to narrow the curriculum to that which can be easily evidenced.

However, the main concerns expressed by schools relate to accountability.

Accountability (Accountabilities?)

Schools query the fitness-for-purpose of the assessment arrangements to provide a reliable, valid measure which will allow for fair comparisons to be made between schools. These include:

- The lack of standardisation of data this year. This may be due in part to the fact that moderation is voluntary in the Primary sector in this first year, and to the decision of some unions not to participate in the arrangements.
- The continued potential for manipulation of outcomes due to real or perceived pressure for outcomes to be higher, or for schools to influence unduly the evidence in portfolios (e.g. through constant redrafting, excessive teacher support, manufacturing of evidence). Sampling can mitigate this risk but not eliminate it. Greater mitigation requires closer scrutiny, larger samples and more robust measures. This is likely to involve more collaboration and ultimately may not increase confidence in the accuracy of outcomes.
- The potential for unintended consequences of using teachers' judgements for accountability purposes; for example, for the requirements of assessment arrangements to narrow and distort, rather than support, the curriculum, or to create 'perverse' assessment behaviours such as an undue reliance on 'teaching to the test'.

If the data are not consistent between schools and across the system, this causes particular and immediate concerns for schools about the uses to which the data is put:

- Bench marking and target setting – schools are concerned that those external agencies scrutinising data (ETI, ELBs, CCMS etc) may not take account of the variance in outcomes and may draw conclusions about school performance which go beyond that which can be supported by the available evidence.
- School data is included in the annual report to parents and the school prospectus. This information may influence decisions by parents about the school to which they send their child. This is of particular concern at a time of diminishing rolls, increased competition between schools and concerns about sustainability.

Previous CCEA advice identified this tension and considered potential solutions (such as the use of a separate sampling mechanism). These are set out in more detail below.

The Way Forward?

To summarise, the main issue is the tension between two key policies; that of an assessment system based on teacher assessment and that of accountability. There can be a conflict when teacher judgement is used to summarise pupil performance, and when the performance data are then used for accountability purposes. 'While many systems rely on teacher judgement for assessments that are high stakes for students, there are… no systems that rely on teacher judgement for assessments that are high stakes for teachers'[1].

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[1] Black P and Wiliam D (2007): Large-scale Assessment Systems: Design principles drawn from international comparisons. Measurement, 5 (1): 1-53. Cited in 'Assessment in schools: Fit for purpose?', ARG

So, to alleviate this tension, consideration might be given either to changing the measure (teacher assessment using levels of progression at the end of key stages) or reviewing the accountability context within which that measure is considered.

Change the measure?

It is true that a process based on teacher assessment may be open to bias and subjectivity and to the manipulation (conscious or unconscious) of outcomes.

For example, following the 2012 English GCSE controversy around the change in grade boundaries for the teacher-assessed component, the chief executive of AQA told the House of Commons education select committee that he believed that teachers had been encouraged to boost marks by government measures that hold them to account based on their pupils' results and that they were in a position where "their judgements were influenced by the pressures of the accountability system"[2].

Other assessment practices (such as use of standardised tests, external examinations) can be perceived as more objective, reliable sources of information about the performance of pupils. However, any use of assessment outcomes for high stakes purposes will exert pressure on those involved and thereby influence their work. Therefore, as identified in *Assessment in Schools: Fit for Purpose*[3], any decision on the use of assessment data for accountability purposes has to keep two key questions in mind.

1 What are the data attempting to measure?
2 What will be the consequences of publishing the data for accountability purposes?

The publication outlines this as follows:

For the outcomes of any assessment to be used justifiably to measure the performance of an education system, there must be a secure causal, consistent and quantifiable relationship between the quality of the inputs to the education system in question and the outputs from the associated assessment. For example, the lack of a secure relationship between the outcomes of examinations and the quality of the related education system explains why it has been possible for Labour and Conservative governments in England to give different and contradictory explanations for the rise in GCSE and GCE grade outcomes between 2002 and 2011, as to whether the rise in grade outcomes reflects improved educational standards that are the result of the investment Labour governments made in education during the last decade, or if the rise in grade outcomes is evidence of grade inflation and falling examination standards.

The nature and impact of assessment depends on the uses to which the results of that assessment are put. Important questions should be asked, particularly if results are to be used in "high stakes" situations. If, for example, the fate of a school may hang on a single set of test results, are the data they generate reliable enough to serve as a measure of the overall quality of that institution? Are they valid in measuring all that is felt to be important in education? Do they ultimately provide

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[2] The Guardian, 12 March 2013
[3] *Assessment in Schools: Fit for Purpose?* Teaching and Learning Research Programme, 2009

information that will help pupils improve? Finally, does the act of placing weight on the results of these tests affect the teaching that takes place in preparation for these assessments and, if there are negative impacts, are we prepared to tolerate them?

Accountability pressures have led schools to become more focused on some aspects of what policy-makers may see as important in education, such as the securing of good grades in key examination subjects for their pupils. However, in doing so, they have also encouraged schools to narrow the range of their aims, to teach to the test, or to choose subjects for which qualifications appear easier to secure. In many such ways, the accountability system may come to damage the very outcomes that it was designed to improve. Policy-makers should also acknowledge that the publication of data will influence behaviour within institutions, in intended and unintended ways.

Change the accountability context?

Governments invest hugely in their education systems. It is right and proper that they should seek to measure the performance of those education systems in order to establish that their investment is having a positive impact on educational outcomes for young people.   We need to know how schools and the system are doing, and for this, data are required.

However, a more sophisticated approach to the use of data is required if unintended consequences are to be avoided, through using and analysing a range of available information (both quantitative and qualitative) to inform initiatives rather than over-reliance on any one measure.

It may be that this principle is already well accepted and established at a policy level. However, schools' perception is that the focus (of CCEA, The Department, ETI etc) is on a narrow range of measures such as end-of-key-stage levels and GCSE grades A* to C. It may be because this information is easily and widely available and is common to all schools.   It may be because legislation (reporting, target-setting, prospectus, end-of-key-stage) and published system targets (*Count, Read: Succeed*) are focused on this data.

Whatever the case, a more explicit message is required to link the use of assessment data with the excellent work that is being done in building school and system expertise in the effective use of such data.

This may be seen in the recent (February 2013) NIAO Report to the Northern Ireland Assembly on Improving Literacy and Numeracy Achievement in Schools. The report highlights progress against targets in end-of-key-stage and GCSE outcomes. It considers other evidence from international comparative studies. However, and crucially, it also looks at other factors such as the gap between lowest and highest achieving, the effect of social deprivation (particularly the difference in impact between controlled and maintained sectors) and outcomes for boys. It also considers the positive impact of good classroom practice, effective school leadership, diagnosing and addressing individual learning needs, the role of families, and the sharing of data and its use by schools.

CCEA considers that reviewing the accountability context is the preferred way forward, not by reducing the accountability requirements, but by reframing and refocusing them. However, how can we set the statutory assessment requirements in this context?

The Way Forward?: Recommendations and Action Plan

Longer Term: System Accountability

Use and analysis of a range of available information (both quantitative and qualitative) to inform initiatives.

Sampling

Consideration should be given to using an objective measure of pupil performance which would be distinct from, but complementary to, assessment in schools. This could be through the continued use of international comparative studies such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS.

Black (1998) suggests that one form of assessment that can be used to measure and monitor the performance of an education system is what he calls 'matrix light sampling'. Drawing on sampling theory, matrix light sampling is a form of assessment that can run in parallel with high stakes examinations and which can be designed specifically to monitor and measure the performance of an education system. Even based on small samples of around 500 students, matrix light sampling has been shown to be capable of exploring "a wider range of attainments in greater detail than [is] possible with a test which [is] the same for every pupil. In consequence the data obtained [are] … more relevant to policy debates than public examination data have ever been" (Black, 1998, p33). Importantly, the questions used in matrix light sampling can be pre-tested to ensure comparability over time. Matrix light sampling has been used in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Ireland.

The potential of sampling has been outlined in previous CCEA advice, such as that of January 2003 and May 2012.

Data Analysis

Analysis of a range of data could be used to explore identified themes such as gender, social deprivation, trends over time etc at a system level and thus lead to more targeted support.

Available data currently includes, or could include in the future:
- International comparative studies;
- Standardised assessments (depending on policy decisions re CBA);
- Levels data;
- Qualifications data.

For example, the analysis reports for computer-based assessments have identified gender differences and content areas of numeracy which are or are not well-answered. While there are obvious sensitivities around the use of 'diagnostic' assessments at system level, this information has the

potential to be used for its intended purpose of informing actions and interventions at a system level as well as for pupils and schools. If used in an anonymous way, valuable insights can be gained without impacting on behaviours such as teaching to the test.

This may all address the requirement for information at a system level.   However, what about accountability at a school level?

Longer Term: School Accountability

Accountability should be focused on governance and school self-evaluation, on how schools use analysis of a range of data, including examination results, end-of-key-stage outcomes and standardised tests, to identify areas for attention, to effect improvement and to gauge the effectiveness of interventions.

Consideration should be given to addressing gaps such as those identified in the PWC *Final Report on School and Pupil Performance Data* (November 2008), for example:

- suitable baseline measurement and longitudinal data;
- qualitative indicators to provide a more holistic view of the achievements of individual young people and schools;
- additional measures of performance to guard against the potential risk of perverse performance incentives;
- measures of deprivation and other contextual data in the development of any value-added measure.

Short Term

What do we do about assessment and legislation in the meantime?

Two strands are proposed:

1. Initiate a policy review, including 'joined up' consideration of legislation already under review (i.e. computer-based assessment, reporting, target-setting, prospectus).
2. In the meantime, reduce the pressure of end-of-key-stage assessment by focusing more on its use in the classroom.

1.   Review of Policy

There are a number of policy reviews already underway:
- CCEA review of the operation of end-of-key-stage assessment arrangements (summer term 2013).
- DE policy review of computer-based assessments (recommendations due June 2013).
- DE consultation exercise re revising existing legislation for reporting, target setting and school prospectus.
- Review of GCSE and GCE qualifications.

This therefore an ideal opportunity to link these reviews together.

Appendix 3 provides a more detailed consideration of the principles underpinning computer-based assessment and the options in relation to its legislative position moving forward. As with end-of-key-stage assessment, there are important key principles which should be maintained.

2. Levels of Progression

In the meantime, schools should continue to use the new levels of progression, with the focus on their use as a shared framework for learning, teaching and progression on a whole school basis, rather than a mechanism for formal comparison between schools. Confidence can be built through professional debate, in internal standardisation and inter-school engagement. External moderation should be seen as supportive rather than punitive. In this context, consideration could be given to different options for moderation, from use of a random rather than a stratified sample, to visiting moderators, to use of a school portfolio.

The Department has already recognised the need for flexibility and support over the coming years, that it will take time for any new system to bed down and that outcomes will fluctuate in initial years. It has not set system targets for KS1-3 for the 2012-13 and 2013-14 years.

However, schools still have concerns about the publishing of data in this context – in annual reports to parents, in school prospectuses, in bench-marking data – and the potential impact of the conclusions that may be drawn by those who do not have a full understanding of their context and of the limitations of the data. Therefore, consideration should be given to what flexibility can be provided within the system in the short term (in terms of schools' statutory obligations) to allow these new practices to embed and for debate to take place.