

Final report of the Commission on Assessment without Levels

September 2015



Chaired by John McIntosh CBE

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Foreword from the chair of the commission



It was with considerable pleasure that I accepted the invitation to chair the Commission on Assessment Without Levels. Throughout my career in teaching I have always had a strong interest and involvement in the curriculum and have enjoyed the privilege of serving as a member of the National Curriculum Council in the 1990s and more recently as a member of the National Curriculum Review Committee. It goes without saying that assessment goes hand-in-hand with the curriculum; but it is high quality *formative assessment* that goes to the very heart of good teaching.

While few would dispute the need for a robust accountability framework, there is no doubt that the measurement of the performance of schools and of the system as a whole has exerted undue influence on the assessment of individual pupils.

The changes to the National Curriculum and its assessment go well beyond mere changes of content. They invoke very different day-to-day approaches to assessment and signal fundamental shifts in ideas about learning and assessment.

The Commission supports, and has built on, the analysis of the importance of ‘curriculum coherence’, which was essential to the National Curriculum Review and highlighted in the Expert Panel report¹. Deriving from Bill Schmidt’s work on high-performing systems, this emphasises the alignment of curriculum, assessment, inspection, and other key elements of arrangements². Our analysis similarly places great importance on the necessary alignment of purpose, form and processes within assessment and the alignment of assessment with other key aspects of curriculum and accountability policy.

Our consultations and discussions highlighted the extent to which teachers are subject to conflicting pressures: trying to make appropriate use of assessment as part of the day-to-day task of classroom teaching, while at the same time collecting assessment data which will be used in very high stakes evaluation of individual and institutional performance. These conflicted purposes too often affect adversely the fundamental aims of the curriculum, particularly regarding breadth of content and depth of learning. Our guidance and recommendations aim to support better curriculum coherence in the system. The successful implementation of the new national curriculum requires a radical cultural and pedagogical change, from one which has been too dominated by the requirements of the national assessment framework and testing regime to one where the focus needs to be on high-quality, in-depth teaching, supported by in-class formative assessment.

There is overwhelming evidence that levels needed to go and the Commission strongly endorses the decision to remove them. However, the system has been so conditioned by levels that there is considerable challenge in moving away from them. We have been concerned by evidence that some schools are trying to recreate levels based on the new national curriculum. Unless this is addressed, we run the risk of failing to put in place the conditions for a higher-attaining, higher-equity system.

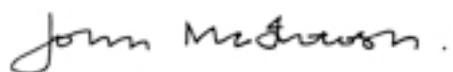
Changing the culture of levels is not only the key to implementing the new curriculum, but is the key to raising standards by enriching learning and pupil motivation and enabling teachers to grow professionally and make better use of their time, knowledge and skills. This is an opportunity the profession cannot afford to miss.

During the life of the Commission it has been a pleasure to engage with teachers, school leaders, teaching unions and associations. We have found it extremely helpful to discuss their concerns and their views about how these might be addressed. There is a great deal of common ground among the profession, shared by the Commission, regarding assessment without levels, which we have tried to capture and address in this report.

The Commission has been impressed by the way teacher associations and unions have already responded to the challenge of the new assessment regime and the opportunity it presents to re-focus assessment as part of sound classroom practice. We believe they have a very important part to play in its implementation.

The report does not provide schools with a template for assessment without levels but offers guidance and support to help schools in designing their own assessment policies, in parallel with their curriculum policies.

I should like to express my gratitude to members of the Commission for their time and expertise, to the secretariat at the Department for Education for their very professional and unstinting support, and to all others who have contributed to the work of the Commission.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John McIntosh". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

John McIntosh CBE

Executive summary

Introduction

Attainment targets and levels were introduced with the national curriculum in 1988. When the new national curriculum was published in 2014, new forms of assessment were developed to align with its content and principles. From September 2015, national curriculum levels will no longer be used for statutory assessments. The Commission on Assessment Without Levels was set up to provide advice and support to schools in developing new approaches to their own in-school assessment and to ensure they have information to make informed choices about what might work for their pupils, staff and curriculum.

The rationale for the removal of levels

Despite being intended only for use in statutory national assessments, too frequently levels also came to be used for in-school assessment between key stages in order to monitor whether pupils were on track to achieve expected levels at the end of key stages. This distorted the purpose of in-school assessment, particularly day-to-day formative assessment. The Commission believes that this has had a profoundly negative impact on teaching.

Too often levels became viewed as thresholds and teaching became focused on getting pupils across the next threshold instead of ensuring they were secure in the knowledge and understanding defined in the programmes of study. Depth and breadth of understanding were sometimes sacrificed in favour of pace. Levels also used a 'best fit' model, which meant that a pupil could have serious gaps in their knowledge and understanding, but still be placed within the level. This meant it wasn't always clear exactly which areas of the curriculum the child was secure in and where the gaps were.

The purposes and principles of assessment

The overriding principle of good assessment is that it should be clearly tied to its intended purpose. There are three main forms of assessment: in-school formative assessment, which is used by teachers to evaluate pupils' knowledge and understanding on a day-to-day basis and to tailor teaching accordingly; in-school summative assessment, which enables schools to evaluate how much a pupil has learned at the end of a teaching period; and nationally standardised summative assessment, which is used by the Government to hold schools to account. Good formative assessment ranges from the probing question put to a pupil as they think something through; quick recap questions at the opening of a lesson; scrutiny of the natural work of pupils; right through to formal tests.

To use each form of assessment to best effect, it is important that teachers and school leaders understand their various purposes. Schools must be clear why pupils are being assessed, what the assessment is intended to achieve and how the assessment information will be used. The Commission has not sought to prescribe any specific model of assessment, but to highlight the principles which should underpin any approach. These principles are presented in the form of questions that school leaders and teachers can ask themselves when developing their approach to in-school formative and summative assessment.

Guidance for assessment policies

The guidance is intended for schools to use when writing an assessment policy. It does not prescribe specific content, but provides questions which schools can ask to provide assurance that the policies they develop will be clear and effective. The guidance should be used alongside the 'Purposes and Principles of Assessment Without Levels' to encourage schools to consider how they can best use assessment for teaching and learning.

The starting point for any assessment policy should be the school's principles of assessment. It should be clear what the aims of assessment are and how they can be achieved without adding unnecessarily to teacher workload. The policy should set out the arrangements for the governance, management and evaluation of assessment within the school in order to ensure that it is a live document, which is reviewed regularly.

A good assessment policy will be clear about how assessment outcomes will be used, with a view to collecting data only where necessary and ensuring assessment outcomes are communicated effectively to pupils, parents and other teachers. It should also outline arrangements for ensuring teachers are able to conduct assessment, confidently and competently, by explaining how access to professional development will be provided.

Data collection and reporting

The Department for Education's Workload Challenge consultation demonstrated that many teachers found data entry and data management in their school burdensome. Data management systems are often complicated and demand a large amount of teachers' time to design and use them. The Commission believes that much of this time is taken up unnecessarily and could be better spent in the classroom.

The fundamental question for teachers and school leaders to consider in evaluating systems for collecting and reporting assessment data is what purposes the data is intended to support. Formative assessment is intended to inform teaching and learning. There is no intrinsic value in recording formative assessment; what matters is that it is acted on.

The purpose of in-school summative assessment is to evaluate pupils' learning and progress at the end of a period of teaching. When considering how to collect and report summative assessment information, the Commission recommends schools ask themselves what uses the assessments are intended to support, what the quality of the assessment information will be, how much time it would take teachers to record the information, and how frequently it is appropriate to collect and report it.

Evaluating external assessment systems

The Commission recognises that many schools may consider using assessment systems that have been developed by external providers. Schools should develop their approach to assessment before considering external assessment systems in order that products can be evaluated according to how they fit with the school's aims, assessment policy and curriculum.

To help schools evaluate the potential value of external assessment products, the Commission recommends that schools ask themselves whether the product supports the school's policy on assessment, the extent to which it will support delivery of that policy, whether the assessment approach on which the product is based is credible, and whether the product provides good value. Any product is likely to be just one element of the school's assessment. It should only be adopted if it presents the best way to support delivery of the school's assessment policy.

Accountability and inspection

The Commission has repeatedly heard that schools' approaches to assessment and data management are driven by expectations of what Ofsted inspectors are looking for. In this section Ofsted provide clarification on their position and respond to common myths about their requirements around data collection and reporting.

Ofsted is only one part of the national accountability framework. Schools should not seek to devise a system that they think inspectors will want to see; it should be one that works for pupils, with the sole aim of supporting their achievement. Inspectors will look at the effectiveness of a school's curriculum and assessment system in terms of the impact on pupils' achievement through the key judgement areas of the Common Inspection Framework.

Ofsted is very clear that unnecessary or extensive collections of marked pupils' work are not required for inspection purposes. It is also clear that it does not expect performance data to be presented in a particular format. Data should be provided to inspectors in the format that the school would ordinarily use to monitor the progress of its pupils. Pupils' work will of course continue to be an important consideration when evaluating outcomes for pupils and the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Ensuring a fully inclusive approach to assessment

The principles of assessment without levels apply to all pupils, including those with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities. However, there are some further points of guidance that schools may find helpful to ensure their approaches to assessment are appropriate for pupils with SEN and disabilities.

Assessment should be inclusive of all abilities. It should be used diagnostically to contribute to the early and accurate identification of children and young people's special educational needs and any requirements for support and intervention. For pupils with recognised SEN and disabilities, assessment should consider long-term wider outcomes such as higher education, employment and independent living. Schools should consider meaningful ways of measuring all aspects of progress including communication, social skills, physical development, resilience and independence.

High expectations should apply equally to pupils with SEN and disabilities as to all other pupils. However, this should account for the amount of effort the pupil puts in as well as the outcomes achieved. Assessment methods may need to be adapted for some pupils with SEN and disabilities, for example by using visual stimuli and alternative means of communication.

Teacher education

The Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) identified assessment as the area of greatest weakness in current training programmes. The Commission agrees that the quality of assessment training is currently too weak and reiterates the importance of schools taking up opportunities to train staff in assessment.

The Commission also agrees with the Carter Review that the link between ITT and professional development is often weak in the system. The Commission believes that beyond ITT every teacher should have the opportunity to become skilled and confident at assessing pupils' learning. Furthermore, there should be an explicit expectation that school leaders and the Ofsted inspectorate develop a rigorous and shared understanding of all aspects of assessment.

Within a changing landscape of teaching school alliances, school clusters, local authorities and academy groups, there is an opportunity for leading teachers to support local assessment practice. The Commission recognises the importance of system leaders enabling collaborative professional development across local regions and suggests that high quality professional development endorsed by assessment experts from higher education institutions could be developed for delivery locally via regional groups such as teaching schools and local authorities.

Next steps and recommendations

The Commission hopes this report will be helpful in supporting schools on their journey towards developing new systems of assessment, but recognises that further support may be needed to embed and share good practice. With this in mind, the Commission has made the following recommendations:

1. The Commission recommends the appointment of a standing committee on assessment, supported by a panel of experts. The committee could call on the experts to provide advice when required, to oversee the next phase of implementation and to have continuing stewardship of assessment development.
2. The Commission recommends that any Government review of initial teacher training ensures that assessment is included in the core content for teacher training. It also recommends that the Government requires a suitable training course for one person within each Teaching School alliance, who will become a Specialist Leader in Education on assessment to provide professional development on assessment more widely.
3. The Commission recommends the establishment of a national item bank of assessment questions to be used both for formative assessment in the classroom, to help teachers evaluate understanding of a topic or concept, and for summative assessment, by enabling teachers to create bespoke tests for assessment at the end of a topic or teaching period. The Commission also recommends the creation of a dedicated online forum where teachers can share their ideas on assessment.
4. The Commission recommends the development of a training module that can be used for both senior leaders in schools and Ofsted inspectors to ensure a shared understanding of the principles and purposes of assessment, what good practice looks like and how it can be demonstrated in schools.
5. The Commission welcomes the Department for Education's decision to establish a review group on school data management and recommends that this group helps to build the evidence base to understand what drives data management practices and provides further practical advice to schools on reducing the workload burden.
6. The Commission welcomes the Department for Education's decision to establish an expert group on assessment for pupils who are working below the level of the national curriculum tests. The Commission recommends this includes a review of P-Scales to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Introduction

Attainment Targets and levels were introduced with the national curriculum in 1988. A new national curriculum was published in 2014 and statutory assessment arrangements will change in summer 2016 to align with its content and principles. From September 2015, levels will no longer be used for statutory assessments. Although Attainment Targets remain in the national curriculum orders, they now refer explicitly to ensuring all pupils know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the relevant programme of study.

From summer 2016 the results of national curriculum tests at Key Stage 1 and 2 will be reported in the form of scaled scores³. The Department for Education has also confirmed plans to provide further information on arrangements for statutory teacher assessment by September 2015. The Department has been clear, however, that schools should have the freedom to develop their own approaches to in-school assessment between key stages and that this should not necessarily emulate statutory assessment for accountability purposes.

The Commission on Assessment Without Levels was set up by the Minister for School Reform in February 2015 to support schools with developing new approaches to assessment following the removal of levels. After the first meeting in March, the Commission published its terms of reference and a statement of intended outputs. This report is the culmination of the Commission's work and delivers the outputs that the Commission committed to six months ago.

The Commission decided at the outset not to prescribe any particular model for in-school assessment. In the context of curriculum freedoms and increasing autonomy for schools, it would make no sense to prescribe any one model for assessment. Curriculum and assessment are inextricably linked. Schools should be free to develop an approach to assessment which aligns with their curriculum and works for their pupils and staff.

With freedom, however, comes responsibility. Developing a successful approach to assessment depends on a clear understanding of the purposes and principles of assessment. To support schools in developing the best approach to assessment for their curriculum, pupils and staff, the Commission has focused its attention on advice which will build understanding and expertise and will guide schools through the thinking required to develop effective new approaches to assessment.

The report starts by explaining the rationale for removing levels and highlights some of the problems that assessment with levels led to. The next section lays out the purposes and principles of assessment. This section can be used on its own for teacher training and development. It encourages schools to think about their approaches to assessment in the light of the various purposes assessment serves for pupils, parents, teachers, school leaders and Ofsted.

The fundamental principles of assessment are framed as questions which schools can ask themselves as they think through which systems will work for them.

Next comes the guidance for assessment policies. This can also be used separately as a guide which schools can work through to develop a policy on assessment. It is intended for use in in-service training or as a practical support for staff with responsibility for assessment in schools. It summarises the essential components of an assessment policy and again offers questions which encourage schools to think about what these should look like in their context.

In recognition of the demands it places on teacher workload, more detailed advice has been provided on collecting and reporting assessment data. This is followed by information on factors schools may want to take into account if considering purchasing external assessment systems.

The subsequent section on inspection and accountability has been written in collaboration with Ofsted. The Commission acknowledges the importance of Ofsted's role in influencing and evaluating assessment practice. This section demonstrates the consistency between the Commission's advice and Ofsted's approach to inspection, as reflected in the 2015 Ofsted handbook.

The report includes a section designed to ensure that schools take pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities into account when developing their approach to assessment without levels. The principles of assessment without levels apply equally to all pupils, including those with SEN and disabilities, but it is important that any potential differences in application are considered as new systems of assessment are developed.

Throughout the report, the Commission has provided examples of good practice. The Commission is aware that there is much excellent practice emerging in schools throughout the country, but it is early days in the transition to life without levels and much of this practice is still in development. The Commission would encourage schools to continue sharing ideas and build a continuing dialogue about good practice in assessment.

The penultimate section of the report focuses on teacher education. It highlights the importance of ensuring that initial teacher training and continuous professional development include modules on assessment. Effective change can only be delivered if supported by high-quality training and development opportunities.

In the final section, the Commission outlines the next steps for embedding new approaches to assessment without levels and makes some recommendations for further actions. Whilst the report has been written primarily for an audience of teachers, school leaders, governors and other stakeholders this section includes a small number of recommendations addressed to the Government to ensure that the right support is in place to help schools continue on their journey of embedding effective assessment without levels once the Commission has disbanded.⁴

The rationale for the removal of levels

Despite a wider set of original purposes, the pressure generated by the use of levels in the accountability system led to a curriculum driven by Attainment Targets, levels and sub-levels, rather than the programmes of study. Levels came to dominate all forms of assessment. Not only were they used for both statutory national curriculum tests and statutory reporting of teacher assessment, but they also came to be used too frequently for in-school assessment between key stages in order to monitor whether pupils were on track to achieve expected levels at the end of key stages.

The Commission believes that this has had a profoundly negative impact on teaching and learning. Alongside the Government's changes to ways of reporting national curriculum test outcomes and statutory teacher assessment, the freedom for schools to develop their own approaches to in-school assessment means that the three forms of assessment – formative assessment, in-school summative assessment and nationally standardised summative assessment⁵ – can be appropriately tied to their different purposes. Overall this will better serve the needs of pupils and promote a higher quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The problems with levels

Accuracy and consistency of assessment

Although levels were intended to be used to assess pupils against the whole programme of study, the results of almost any assessment were translated into a level or sublevel and used as a measure of overall attainment. This either required aggregating a wide variety of data into a single number, which did not represent pupil performance accurately, or meant that levels were being assigned to individual pieces of work, regardless of how much of the programme of study they covered.

Too often levels became viewed as thresholds and teaching became focused on getting pupils across the next threshold instead of ensuring they were secure in the knowledge and understanding defined in the programmes of study. In reality, the difference between pupils on either side of a boundary might have been very slight, while the difference between pupils within the same level might have been very different.

Progress became synonymous with moving on to the next level, but progress can involve developing deeper or wider understanding, not just moving on to work of greater difficulty. Sometimes progress is simply about consolidation.

Levels also used a 'best fit' model, which meant that a pupil could have serious gaps in their knowledge and understanding, but still be placed within the level. There were additional challenges in using the best fit model to appropriately assess pupils with uneven profiles of abilities, such as children with autism.

Although levels were intended to define common standards of attainment, the level descriptors were open to interpretation. Different teachers could make different judgements. Teachers receiving new pupils frequently disagreed with the levels those pupils had been given by previous teachers. Consequently, the information secondary schools received from primary schools was sometimes felt to be unreliable or unhelpful.

Impact on teaching and learning

Too often levels have dominated lesson planning. Teachers planned lessons which would allow pupils to learn or demonstrate the requirements for specific levels. This encouraged teachers to design and use only classroom assessments that would report a level outcome. As a result, formative classroom assessment was not always being used as an integral part of effective teaching. Instead of using classroom assessments to identify strengths and gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding of the programmes of study, some teachers were simply tracking pupils' progress towards target levels. The drive for progress across levels also led teachers to focus their attention disproportionately on pupils just below level boundaries.

In addition, levels were often the main focus of conversations with pupils and their parents or carers⁶. Pupils compared themselves to others and often labelled themselves according to the level they were at. This encouraged pupils to adopt a mind-set of fixed ability, which was particularly damaging where pupils saw themselves at a lower level. The disconnect between levels and the content of the national curriculum also meant that telling a parent his or her child was level 4b, did not provide meaningful information about what that child knew and understood or needed to know to progress. Levels were used to measure both end of phase achievement and lesson-by-lesson formative progress, but they had not been designed to fulfil the latter purpose, with the result that formative assessment was often distorted.

Assessing knowledge and understanding of the new national curriculum

Levels did not lend themselves to assessing the underpinning knowledge and understanding of a concept. For example, using certain vocabulary in written work was indicative of a level, but did not necessarily provide evidence of conceptual understanding. The changes to the new national curriculum now provide the basis for a different, more secure assessment based on deeper learning.

“When considering the school’s records for the progress of current pupils, inspectors will recognise that schools are at different points in their move towards adopting a system of assessment without national curriculum levels.”

Ofsted Handbook, 2015

The benefits of assessment without levels

Assessment without levels gives schools the opportunity to develop their own approaches to assessment that focus on teaching and learning and are tailored to the curriculum followed by the school.

Clarity for pupils, parents and carers

Without levels, schools can use their own assessment systems to support more informative and productive conversations with pupils and parents. They can ensure their approaches to assessment enable pupils to take more responsibility for their achievements by encouraging pupils to reflect on their own progress, understand what their strengths are and identify what they need to do to improve. Focusing assessment on the content of the school's curriculum will allow for communications with parents and carers to provide a clearer sense of how to support their children to build and consolidate learning.

Support for pupils

By no longer grouping pupils according to levels, teachers can give more focus to providing pupils with feedback which clarifies those aspects of the curriculum where their knowledge and understanding is secure and those areas where there are gaps. Applying a range of formative assessment methods allows teachers to tailor their assessments to the underpinning knowledge and skills being taught, for example by supporting teaching with “effective question and answer” techniques.

Removing the ‘label’ of levels can help to improve pupils’ mind-sets about their own ability. Differentiating teaching according to pupils’ levels meant some pupils did not have access to more challenging aspects of the curriculum. In reviewing their teaching and assessment strategies following the removal of levels, teachers can aim to ensure they use methods that allow all pupils access to the whole curriculum.

Teacher workload

The expectation to collect data in efforts to track pupils’ progress towards target levels considerably increased teachers’ workload. The Commission hopes that teachers will now build their confidence in using a range of formative assessment techniques as an integral part of their teaching, without the burden of unnecessary recording and tracking. For this approach to be adopted effectively, it is essential that it is supported by school leaders. Data collection and reporting is picked up in more detail on page 30.

*“As part of pupils’ **progress**, inspectors will consider the growth in pupils’ security, breadth and depth of knowledge, understanding and skills.”*

Ofsted Handbook, 2015

Formative assessment

Levels were never designed to capture formative assessment, but they frequently came to be used in this way, which often distorted the purpose of formative assessment and squeezed out certain valuable tasks which were not amenable to levelling.

Whilst summative tasks can be used for formative purposes, tasks that are designed to provide summative data will often not provide the best formative information. Formative assessment does not have to be carried out with the same test used for summative assessment, and can consist of many different and varied tasks and approaches. Similarly, formative assessments do not have to be measured using the same scale that is used for summative assessments.

For this reason, the Commission urges schools to guard against designing or purchasing assessment systems modelled on statutory arrangements for teacher assessment, regardless of how these may change over time.

The Commission encourages schools to make the most of the freedom to develop their own approaches to assessment and explore new methods of recording assessment information.

Assessment and the curriculum

Assessment and pedagogy are inextricably connected. Assessment of pupils' attainment and progress should be directly linked to the curriculum followed by the school. The new national curriculum puts greater emphasis on the specific knowledge pupils should acquire by the end of each key stage and requires greater depth and detail of learning. Removing levels encourages schools to develop approaches to in-school assessment which are better tied to curriculum content, and which do not restrict teaching solely to the specific content in the National Curriculum, but encourage the wider exploration of subjects which results in higher attainment and greater enjoyment.

Similarly, the freedom to choose their own approaches to assessment is consistent with the freedom many schools have to develop and deliver their own curriculum and allows schools to ensure their curriculum and approach to assessment are aligned.

“Inspectors will make a judgement on the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment by evaluating the extent to which the school’s engagement with parents, carers and employers helps them to understand how children and learners are doing in relation to the standards expected and what they need to do to improve,”

Ofsted Handbook, 2015

Adapting to change

The Commission recognises that the transition to assessment without Attainment Targets and levels will be challenging, and that schools will have to develop and manage their assessment systems during a period of change. However, the Commission strongly believes that a much greater focus on high quality formative assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning will have multiple benefits: improving the quality of teaching, contributing to raised standards and reinforcing schools' freedoms to deliver education in the ways that best suit the needs of their pupils and strengths of their staff.

The effectiveness of this transition will rest on high quality continuing professional development and initial teacher education. The Commission has expressed further recommendations to address this essential issue in the Teacher Education section on page 40.

Good practice

Ensuring assessment directly evaluates pupils' knowledge and understanding of curriculum requirements helps to create a virtuous circle of teaching and assessment. Teachers assess pupils' understanding of a topic and identify where there are gaps. This tells the teacher what to focus on in future lessons and prompts the teacher to consider how his or her teaching approach can be adapted to improve pupils' understanding. This, in turn, informs the teacher's thinking about which assessments to use to evaluate whether the new approach has been effective. In this manner, good teaching and assessment continually reinforce each other and generate continuous improvement.

The challenge for schools to create an approach to assessment which works for pupils with SEN and disabilities, some of whom may be following an alternative curriculum, is often greater. Any assessment methods and tools used should reflect this and support a more suitable approach.

The new national curriculum is founded on the principle that teachers should ensure pupils have a secure understanding of key ideas and concepts before moving onto the next phase of learning. This is particularly beneficial for pupils with special educational needs. It leads to a much more focused approach where early intervention can be provided promptly to address any concerns about pupils' progress. Teachers become much better informed about pupils' understanding of concepts and ideas and can build a more accurate picture of their individual needs. This is an example of how formative assessment can be used for diagnostic purposes.

Mastery in assessment

The word mastery is increasingly appearing in assessment systems and in discussions about assessment. Unfortunately, it is used in a number of different ways and there is a risk of confusion if it is not clear which meaning is intended.

Many schools seem to have adopted the word 'mastery' to denote a high level of performance against curriculum expectations. 'Mastery' has also been associated with particular teaching approaches; for example with the recent promotion of Mathematics Mastery and the observation that this approach is characteristic of high-performing East Asian countries⁷. Here, 'mastery' denotes a focus on achieving a deeper understanding of fewer topics, through problem-solving, questioning and encouraging deep mathematical thinking. Also sometimes associated with this 'mastery' approach is a belief that all children can achieve a high standard and that the purpose of assessment is not differentiation, but ensuring all children have grasped fundamental, necessary content.

'Mastery learning' is a specific approach in which learning is broken down into discrete units and presented in logical order. Pupils are required to demonstrate mastery of the learning from each unit before being allowed to move on to the next, with the assumption that all pupils will achieve this level of mastery if they are appropriately supported. Some may take longer and need more help, but all will get there in the end.

Assessment is built into this process. Following high-quality instruction, pupils undertake formative assessment that shows what they have learned well and what they still need to work on, and identifies specific 'corrective' activities to help them do this. After undertaking these corrective activities (or alternative enrichment or extension activities for those who have already achieved mastery), pupils retake a parallel assessment. A large amount of high-quality research has evaluated mastery learning and found consistent and positive impacts on learning (e.g. Kulik et al, 1990; Guskey, 2012)⁸.

The new national curriculum is premised on this kind of understanding of mastery, as something which every child can aspire to and every teacher should promote. It is about deep, secure learning for all, with extension of able students (more things on the same topic) rather than acceleration (rapidly moving on to new content). Levels were not consistent with this approach because they encouraged undue pace and progression onto more difficult work while pupils still had gaps in their knowledge or understanding. In developing new approaches to assessment, schools have the opportunity to make "mastery for all" a genuine goal.

Good practice

In mathematics lessons, teachers can assess mastery through formative questions that focus on the different aspects of the concept being assessed. The questions can be used to uncover a pupil's reasoning behind the answers. It can sometimes be helpful for teachers to focus on the wrong answers, which can be used to explore the concept in greater depth and to identify and address any misconceptions.

The purposes and principles of assessment

Schools have the freedom to choose their own approaches to formative and summative assessment, according to what best suits their pupils, curriculum and staff. This provides an opportunity for schools to challenge and improve their assessment systems and to build greater expertise in assessment.

The Commission's purposes and principles of assessment have been developed as a starting point for schools developing or selecting their approach to assessment without levels. They can also be used to evaluate approaches already in use and may provide ideas for improvements. The Commission does not seek to prescribe any specific assessment systems, but to highlight the principles which should underpin any approach.

The purposes of assessment

Effective assessment will be clearly tied to its purpose. Before designing or selecting an assessment method, schools should be clear:

- Why pupils are being assessed
- The things which the assessment is intended to measure
- What the assessment is intended to achieve
- How the assessment information will be used

Different forms of assessment may serve different purposes for different people and organisations, including pupils, parents, teachers and support staff, school leaders, school governors, the Government and Ofsted.

There are three broad overarching forms of assessment, each with its own purposes

Day-to-day in-school formative assessment, for example:

- *Question and answer during class*
- *Marking of pupils' work*
- *Observational assessment*
- *Regular short re-cap quizzes*
- *Scanning work for pupil attainment and development*

In-school summative assessment, for example:

- *End of year exams*
- *Short end of topic or unit tests*
- *Reviews for pupils with SEN and disabilities*

Nationally standardised summative assessment, for example:

- *National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 2*
- *National Curriculum teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 1*

The primary purposes of day-to-day in-school formative assessment

For pupils:

In-school formative assessment helps pupils to measure their knowledge and understanding against learning objectives and wider outcomes and to identify where they need to target their efforts to improve.

For parents:

When effectively communicated by teachers, in-school formative assessments provide parents with a broad picture of where their children's strengths and weaknesses lie and what they need to do to improve. This reinforces the partnership between parents and schools in supporting children's education.

For teachers:

In-school formative assessment should be an integral part of teaching and learning. It allows teachers to understand pupil performance on a continuing basis. It enables teachers to identify when pupils are struggling, when they have consolidated learning and when they are ready to progress. In this way, it supports teachers to provide appropriate support or extension as necessary. It also enables teachers to evaluate their own teaching of particular topics or concepts and to plan future lessons accordingly.

For school leaders:

In-school formative assessment provides a level of assurance for school leaders. If school leaders are confident their staff are carrying out effective formative assessment, they can be assured that problems will be identified at the individual level and that every child will be appropriately supported to make progress and meet expectations.

For the Government:

The Commission believes that the Government should not intervene at the level of formative assessment, which should serve the needs of pupils and teachers.

For Ofsted:

Ofsted will want to be assured that teachers are making effective use of formative assessment to support teaching and learning. It forms part of Ofsted's wider judgements about the quality of teaching in schools.

*“Ofsted recognises that marking and feedback to pupils, both written and oral, are important aspects of assessment. However, Ofsted **does not** expect to see any specific frequency, type or volume of marking and feedback; these are for the school to decide through its assessment policy. Marking and feedback should be consistent with that policy, which may cater for different subjects and different age groups of pupils in different ways, in order to be effective and efficient in promoting learning.”*

Ofsted Handbook, 2015

The primary purposes of in-school summative assessment

For pupils:

In-school summative assessment provides pupils with information about how well they have learned and understood a topic or course of work taught over a period of time. It should be used to provide feedback on how they can continue to improve.

For parents:

In-school summative assessments can be reported to parents to inform them about the achievement, progress and wider outcomes of their children across a period, often a term, half-year or year.

For teachers:

In-school summative assessment enables teachers to evaluate both pupil learning at the end of an instructional unit or period (based on pupil-level outcomes) and the impact of their own teaching (based on class-level outcomes). Both these purposes help teachers to plan for subsequent teaching and learning.

For school leaders:

In-school summative assessment enables school leaders to monitor the performance of pupil cohorts, to identify where interventions may be required and to work with teachers to ensure pupils are supported to achieve sufficient progress and expected attainment.

For the Government:

The Government does not have a role in determining in-school summative assessment. It is for schools to decide which forms of in-school summative assessment best suit their needs and those of their pupils. In-school summative assessment is not designed to support comparisons between schools, except where schools may be operating within a common system (for example, an academy chain).

For Ofsted:

Ofsted will want to be assured that schools are operating effective systems of assessment for monitoring and supporting pupil performance.

*“Ofsted **will** take a range of evidence into account when making judgements, including published performance data, the school’s in-year performance data and work in pupils’ books and folders. However, unnecessary or extensive collections of marked pupils’ work **are not** required for inspection.”*

Ofsted Handbook, 2015

The primary purposes of nationally standardised summative assessment

For pupils and parents:

Nationally standardised summative assessment provides information on how pupils are performing in comparison to pupils nationally.

For parents:

Nationally standardised summative assessment also provides parents with information on how the school is performing in comparison to schools nationally. This enables parents to hold schools to account and can inform parents' choice of schools for their children.

For teachers:

Nationally standardised summative assessment helps teachers understand national expectations and assess their own performance in the broader national context.

For school leaders and school governors:

Nationally standardised summative assessment enables school leaders and school governors to benchmark their school's performance against other schools locally and nationally, and make judgements about the school's effectiveness.

For the Government:

Nationally standardised summative assessment allows the Government to hold providers of education (schools, local authorities, academy chains etc.) to account and to measure the impact of educational policy making.

For Ofsted:

Nationally standardised summative assessment provides a starting point for Ofsted's discussions with schools when making judgements about their performance, as part of Ofsted's wider judgements of a school's overall effectiveness.

Good practice

Different forms of assessment have different strengths and weaknesses. In-class formative assessment is a vital part of teaching and learning and can provide teachers and pupils with useful, real time information about what needs to happen next; nationally standardised tests are not as helpful diagnostically.

On the other hand, standardised tests (such as those that produce a reading age) can offer very reliable and accurate information, whereas summative teacher assessment can be subject to bias⁹. Teachers should be aware of any potential bias in their assessments of pupils and make conscious efforts to guard against it.

The principles of assessment

The primary principle of assessment is that it should be fit for the purpose intended. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and lies at the heart of promoting pupils' education. It should provide information which is clear, reliable and free from bias.

The Commission on Assessment Without Levels is primarily concerned with supporting schools with in-school formative and summative assessment.

The Commission believes that the guiding principles of these two types of assessment can helpfully be expressed in the form of questions that school leaders and teachers might ask themselves when developing effective approaches to assessment, as set out below.

Principles of in-school formative assessment

1. What will this assessment tell me about pupils' knowledge and understanding of the topic, concept or skill?
 - *For example: whether knowledge and understanding is secure enough to move forward, or whether further consolidation work or a different approach is necessary.*
 - *For example: whether a pupil has been able to demonstrate application of a skill with increasing independence or confidence.*
2. How will I communicate the information I gain from this assessment to pupils in a way that helps them to understand what they need to do to improve?
 - *For example: whether this is better done orally (e.g. through targeted question and answer), in writing or through an alternative form of communication; and whether it is communicated to individuals, groups or the whole class.*
3. How will I ensure pupils understand the purpose of this assessment and can apply it to their own learning?
 - *For example: building in time before the assessment to ensure pupils are prepared for it in a way which clarifies its purpose and after the assessment to support pupils in identifying what they have learned from the assessment about where they need to target their efforts.*
 - *For example: where it may be a challenge for a pupil to understand the purpose of assessment, communicating the outcomes in ways that help the pupil understand their achievements.*
4. How will I ensure my approaches to assessment are inclusive of all abilities?
 - *For example: finding alternative ways to enable pupils to demonstrate their understanding through practical application that can be observed or discussion with the pupil and parents.*
5. How will I use the information I gain from this assessment to inform my planning for future lessons? How could I improve, adapt or target my teaching as a result?

- *For example: identifying which pupils to target for additional support or which areas of the topic to recap.*
6. What follow up action should I take to plug gaps in knowledge and understanding or to support progression where learning is secure?
- *For example: assessing whether pupils who have demonstrated secure understanding can apply the concept in an alternative context or exploring ways in which the concept can be taught differently for pupils who have demonstrated less secure understanding.*
 - *For example: providing opportunities for exploring a concept in greater depth before moving on to new work.*
7. Is it necessary to record the information gained from this assessment? And if so, how can this be done most efficiently?
- *For example: do not assume that everything needs to be recorded. Identify which assessment outcomes are essential to record for the teacher pupil, parent or carer and keep it simple.*
 - *For example: do not assume that formative assessment must be recorded using the same scale or terminology as summative assessment.*

Principles of in-school summative assessment

1. Who will use the information provided by this assessment?
- *For example: the teacher responsible for these pupils the following year.*
 - *For example: senior leaders for curriculum or institutional review.*
 - *For example: for reporting to parents.*
2. Will it give them the information they need for their purposes?
- *For example: how secure a pupil was in their knowledge of the previous year's curriculum and how ready they are for progression.*
 - *For example: useful information on levels of independence, confidence and attitudes to learning of pupils with SEN and disabilities.*
3. How will it be used to support broader progress, attainment and outcomes for the pupils?
- *For example: how the information provided by the assessment can support the following year's teacher in differentiating the support given to pupils in the class to achieve the positive outcomes.*
4. How should the assessment outcomes be communicated to pupils to ensure they have the right impact and contribute to pupils' understanding of how they can make further progress in the future?
- *For example: as part of end of year progress meetings, so that attainment marks are supported by the broader context of the child's progress and understanding.*
 - *For example: using visual methods such as learning journals or videos with pupils with SEN and disabilities as part of their personal learning plan reviews.*
5. How should the assessment outcomes be communicated to parents to ensure they

understand what the outcomes tell them about their child's attainment, progress and improvement needs?

- *For example: how might you communicate to parents that a child who got 12/40 on the test has actually done quite well, all things considered?*
- *For example: how might you communicate to parents the importance of their child with complex needs building on and applying previously learned knowledge and skills?*

6. How should the assessment outcomes be recorded to allow the school to monitor and demonstrate progress, attainment and wider outcomes?

- *For example: how it can be used to provide evidence for Ofsted of how pupil progress informs teaching, or how it informs school improvement, e.g. curriculum development.*

Supporting Guidance for the Purposes and Principles of Assessment

To support schools in answering these questions, the following points of guidance can be taken into account:

- Some types of assessment are capable of being used for more than one purpose. However, this may distort the results, such as where an assessment is used to monitor pupil performance, but is also used as evidence for staff performance management. School leaders should be careful to ensure that the primary purpose of assessment is not distorted by using it for multiple purposes.
- In-school summative assessment should not be driven by nationally collected forms of statutory summative assessment. What works best for national accountability purposes does not necessarily work best for supporting teaching and learning or for monitoring pupil progress.
- An effective in-school summative assessment is one that provides schools with information they can use to monitor and support pupils' progress, attainment and wider outcomes.
- Measuring pupils' progress over a short period is unlikely to be helpful or reliable and it should, therefore, not be necessary to conduct and record in-school summative assessment for monitoring progress more than once a term. Ofsted does not require progress to be recorded with any particular frequency.
- The primary purpose of formative assessment is to inform teaching and learning. Unnecessary recording of formative assessment outcomes should be avoided.
- In-school formative assessment should ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to engage in effective question and answer during class, produce work which exemplifies their learning, demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways and consolidate learning with appropriate homework.
- There is no 'one-size fits all' system for assessment. The best forms of in-school formative and summative assessment will be tailored to the school's own curriculum and the needs of the pupils, parents and staff.

Guidance for assessment policies

The purpose of this guidance is to help schools develop robust assessment policies. It does not seek to provide a template for an ideal assessment policy or to prescribe specific content, but it provides questions which schools can ask to give assurance that the policies they develop will be clear and effective. The guidance should be used alongside the 'Purposes and Principles of Assessment Without Levels' at page 18 to encourage schools to consider how they use assessment for teaching and learning and how this can be embedded in their policies.

A good assessment policy is likely to contain the following components:

1. The principles and aims of assessment

The starting point of any assessment policy should be the school's principles of assessment. The school should outline the different forms of assessment that the school will carry out during the course of a school year and clearly define what the school hopes to achieve in each of them.

In drafting this, schools may want to ask themselves:

- *Have we clearly distinguished the different types of assessment and their purposes as outlined in the 'Purposes and Principles of Assessment Without Levels'?*
- *Have we ensured that the aim of any assessment is not being confused by trying to use it for too many different purposes?*
- *How can we achieve our assessment aims without adding unnecessarily to teacher workload?*
- *What do we know about best practice in assessment in similar schools?*
- *Have we ensured that assessment is for all pupils?*

2. Arrangements for the governance, management and evaluation of assessment

It should be clear who is responsible for maintaining the assessment policy and reviewing or updating it as necessary. It should also be clear how the school will ensure the policy is followed. This may include regular review of classroom practice. The policy should also outline how the effectiveness of the assessment policy will be evaluated.

Schools may want to ask themselves:

- *Who is responsible for ensuring the assessment policy is maintained and followed?*
- *Who is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of assessment practices in the school?*
- *What are the criteria by which effectiveness of the policy and practices will be judged?*

- *When might moderation be necessary to help ensure consistency and accuracy of assessment judgements?*

3. Information about how assessment outcomes will be collected and used

A good assessment policy is clear on how the assessment outcomes will be used. The policy should outline when it is necessary to record assessment data and when the purposes of assessment do not require data to be collected. The policy should be careful to avoid any unnecessary addition to teacher workload.

Schools should consider who assessment information will be shared with and for what purposes. This should take account of how the information will be communicated, as well as the workload implications of presenting data in multiple formats. The majority of information will be shared with pupils to aid their understanding of what they need to do to progress. A smaller proportion of information will be shared with parents. Some statutory information will be sent to the Government and some may be used for evaluating teacher and school performance.

If a school uses aspects of assessment data for purposes such as evaluating teacher performance, it should be clear in the relevant pay and appraisal policies how this data will be used.

In drafting a policy, schools may want to ask themselves:

- *Which data will we collect and what is unnecessary to collect?*
- *How will we use the assessment information we have collected?*
- *With whom should it be shared?*
- *How should it best be communicated to ensure it achieves its purpose?*
- *What arrangements can we put in place to ensure it is only ever collected, shared and used appropriately, without causing unnecessary workload?*
- *How can we guard against the potential distortion of assessment outcomes as a result of different uses?*

4. Arrangements for ensuring teachers are able to conduct assessment competently and confidently

An assessment policy should outline how teachers will be kept up to date with developments in assessment practice and how they will be able to develop and improve their practice on a regular basis.

Schools may want to ask themselves:

- *How do we ensure good understanding of assessment and assessment practice amongst all teachers?*

- *Who will be responsible for ensuring staff have access to professional development opportunities on assessment?*
- *How will we as a school stay abreast of good practice and what mechanisms will we put in place for sharing it?*

5. Detail about the approach to different forms of assessment

Schools may wish to divide their assessment policy according to the three main forms of assessment: in-school formative assessment; in-school summative assessment; and nationally standardised summative assessment. In doing so, schools may want to take account of the following questions and considerations:

5.1 Day-to-day in-school formative assessment

- *What are the school's ideas regarding ability and how assessment supports learning? What is the evidence base?*

A good assessment policy will explain the school's ethos in relation to assessment. It might, for example, avoid ideas of fixed ability and emphasise the opportunity for all pupils to succeed if taught and assessed effectively.

- *What should be assessed formatively?*

A good assessment policy will explain how formative assessment is used to assess knowledge, skills and understanding, and to identify gaps and misconceptions.

- *What methods of formative assessment should we use?*

A good assessment policy will outline the methods of formative assessment; for example the use of rich question and answer sessions during lessons to evaluate pupil understanding and identify gaps or misconceptions.

- *What is the role of pupils in their assessment?*

A good assessment policy should consider the role of the pupil, who may provide useful insight into their own understanding, alongside the value of feedback to enhance pupils' learning.

- *How will our school ensure teachers can accurately assess the progress, attainment and wider outcomes of pupils with SEN and disabilities, including those with complex needs?*

A good assessment policy will explain how the school will ensure pupils with SEN and disabilities are assessed appropriately and effectively in line with the purposes and principles of inclusive assessment.

5.2 In-school summative assessment

- *How is assessment used to (a) inform parents of pupils' development and progress, (b) foster an effective home-school link, and (c) promote home learning?*

A good assessment policy recognises that both assessment objectives and assessment outcomes can be shared with parents to help them support their children's learning.

- *How does the assessment provide useful information for improving future learning, rather than just for the sake of collecting data?*

A good assessment policy ensures that information produced is based on a variety of evidence, is targeted and appropriate for informing teaching and learning.

- *What is our benchmarking scheme?*

A good assessment policy will explain not just how value-added will be achieved in the short term, but how the school will aim to demonstrate improvement over a long period of time.

- *What is our rationale for using specific external commercial tests or similar?*

A good in-school assessment policy ensures that such tests have been validated, align with the school's assessment principles and are administered in line with the test protocols. A good policy will also ensure that the use of the information provided by the test is well-grounded, ethical and supports teaching and learning.

- *How do we standardise and validate the different assessments we use?*

A good assessment policy may acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of different types of assessment, and set out how to resolve these, e.g. supporting accuracy of teacher assessment through use of standardised tests.

5.3 Nationally standardised summative assessment

- *Have we covered the statutory assessment requirements for our school?*

6. Implementation

The development of an assessment policy should involve all staff to ensure effective buy-in and to help build strong links to teaching and learning. Both this 'Guidance for Assessment Policies' and the Commission's 'Purposes and Principles of Assessment Without Levels' are intended as tools that schools can use for training and development days and for reference during the process of developing an assessment policy.

As with all policies, schools should engage with pupils and parents for their input or views. Encouraging pupils to understand the purposes and practices of assessment is an important way of helping them to take responsibility for their own learning and progression. Ensuring parents understand the way pupils will be assessed – and the purposes for which they will be assessed – will enable them to support their children effectively and will help to avoid unnecessary pressure on pupils.

Over time, experience will show what works for pupils and staff. The key to success is to ensure that an assessment policy, like all policies, remains a live document against which success can be evaluated to allow for continuous improvement and to provide the flexibility to adapt and amend assessment practice according to what works for the school.

A national item bank

Some schools use online banks of questions to help with formative assessment. Such banks of question give meaning to the statements contained in assessment criteria and allow pupils to take ownership of their learning by seeing their strengths and weaknesses and improvement over time. Some commercial packages exist with pre-set questions, particularly for maths and science. Other products allow teachers to create their own questions, thus ensuring they align perfectly with the school curriculum.

One of the flaws with national curriculum levels was the way a summative measure came to dominate formative assessment. One way the government could support formative assessment without recreating the problems of levels would be to establish a national item bank of questions based on national curriculum content. Such an item bank could be used for low-stakes assessments by teachers and would help to create a shared language around the curriculum and assessment. It could build on the best practice of schools that are already pioneering this approach. Over time, the bank could also be used to host exemplar work for different subjects and age groups.

Data collection and reporting

The 'Guidance for Assessment Policies' at page 25 of this report stated that a school's assessment policy should outline when it is necessary to record assessment data and when the purposes of assessment do not require data to be collected. Schools may wish to have a separate data collection and reporting policy or simply incorporate it into their wider assessment policy. Either way, schools should give consideration to avoiding any unnecessary addition to teacher workload in developing the policy.

The Department for Education's Workload Challenge¹⁰ consultation ran between 22 October and 21 November 2014. The consultation asked what unnecessary and unproductive tasks take up too much of the workforce's time and where these tasks come from. The results demonstrated that many teachers found data entry and data management in their school burdensome.

Teachers reported recording and analysing data on multiple programmes and reporting it in different ways for different audiences. Recording, inputting, monitoring and analysing data was reported as being burdensome by a majority (56%) of the respondents, and 25% suggested reducing the need for data inputting and analysis as a solution to unnecessary workload. Respondents¹¹ did not claim that these tasks were unnecessary, but that they were sometimes carried out in ways which created extra workload. 63% of sample respondents thought the excessive level of detail required made tasks, including those mentioned above, burdensome, 45% said that duplication added to the burden of their workload, and 41% mentioned the over-bureaucratic nature of the work.

Data management systems are often complicated and demand a large amount of teachers' time to design and use them. The Commission believes that much of this time is taken up unnecessarily and could be better spent in the classroom.

The fundamental question for teachers and school leaders to consider in evaluating systems for collecting and reporting assessment data is what purposes the data is intended to support. In the 'Purposes and Principles of Assessment' at page 18, the Commission has identified two main assessment functions: formative and summative.

Formative assessment is intended to identify learning needs and provide information for teachers and pupils about where pupils are going, how close to it they are and what they need to do to get there. There is no intrinsic value in recording formative assessment; what matters is that it is acted on. If it is acted on, there is likely to be other evidence (e.g. in pupil work, or lesson plans) to show this. The Commission therefore recommends that teachers and school leaders should consider carefully what extra value would be achieved by additional recording and whether it is worth the additional workload it generates.

The purpose of summative assessment is to evaluate pupils' learning and progress at the end of a period of teaching. It may have multiple audiences, including pupils themselves,

parents, teachers, school leaders and inspectors, and each may have different requirements for the kinds of assessment data that should be collected and how it should be analysed and presented. Achieving a good balance between meeting these multiple requirements and keeping the workload manageable is a significant challenge.

The Commission has outlined some questions that may help teachers and school leaders to design or choose collection and reporting systems below:

What interpretations or uses are the assessments intended to support?

Being clear about who will use or interpret the data, and exactly how they will use it, is a crucial step in judging its fitness for purpose. Who are the stakeholders? What kinds of conclusions might they want to be able to draw or interpretations might they want to be able to make? What kinds of decisions or actions might they want to be able to take, based on the data?

What is the quality of the assessment information that is being recorded?

There is no point in collecting 'data' that provides no information about genuine learning. The underlying assessment processes must be valid and reliable to capture authentic learning with adequate precision, free from biases, moderated or standardised if appropriate, and free from unintended side effects.

How much time will it take teachers to record the information?

This should be given explicit consideration, and estimated as an opportunity cost of the system: time spent collecting and recording information is time that could otherwise have been spent on other things.

How frequently is it appropriate to collect and report assessment data?

Many systems require summative tracking data to be entered every few weeks, or less. However, recording summative data more frequently than three times a year is not likely to provide useful information. Over-frequent summative testing and recording is also likely to take time away from formative assessments which offer the potential not just to measure pupils' learning, but to increase it. Schools will need to make judgements about the frequency of data collection and reporting taking account of their individual circumstances and the profile and needs of their pupils.

Evaluating external assessment systems

The Commission recognises that many schools already use, or may be considering using, assessment systems that have been developed by external providers. These may be standalone systems, or part of more comprehensive management information systems. On the face of it, these off-the-shelf systems may seem attractive because they appear to provide an expedient solution to the assessment issue. Schools should, however, ensure that any system that they buy into fully meets the needs of their school curriculum and assessment policy. It is very important that these systems do not reinvent levels, or inappropriately jump to summary descriptions of pupils' attainments. Nor should they overburden teachers with recording duties or data management.

Schools should develop their approach to assessment before considering external assessment systems in order that products can be evaluated according to how they fit with the school's aims and policy. The school's curriculum should determine any use of external products, not the other way round.

Schools should consider any assessment system that goes beyond summative assessment and dictates formative assessment very carefully. There are many ways to teach curriculum content. Approaches to formative assessment that are successful in one context may not be appropriate in other contexts. Effective formative assessment will be dynamic, adapting and evolving in the light of responses in class. Any prescribed form of formative assessment is likely to hinder this process.

There is a good deal of misunderstanding around the use of the word 'tracking' and the Commission has therefore been cautious about using the word in the report. It has become closely associated with measuring progress with levels, in a way that may no longer be appropriate without levels. When evaluating external packages, Schools should be aware of this and tread with caution. For example, tracking software, which has been used widely as a tool for measuring progress with levels, cannot, and should not, be adapted to assess understanding of a curriculum that recognises depth and breadth of understanding as of equal value to linear progression.

To support schools that are considering using external assessments, the Commission has provided questions to help evaluate the potential use or value of available products. The Commission emphasises that neither the Commission, the Department for Education nor Ofsted endorses any external provider or school-based approach.

Does the product support the school's policy on assessment?

Before considering any commercially available assessment tool, schools should make sure their policies on assessment have been confirmed. Any product should be evaluated in terms of how well it supports delivery of that policy. Without a robust policy, it will not be possible to determine the suitability of any assessment product, and it will be easy to

become distracted by superficially attractive features which might turn out to be unnecessary or inappropriate.

To what extent will the product support delivery of that policy?

It is likely that any system that is not designed specifically to support the curriculum and context of the school will help to achieve certain assessment objectives, but not others. It is important to be clear exactly, which objectives can be supported, how well those objectives can be supported and which objectives cannot be supported.

The next step will be to determine how the objectives that cannot be supported by the external system would be achieved. In other words, it is important to work out how the entire assessment system will function. It may be that a separate solution for achieving the remaining objectives will be more complex and time-consuming for staff than developing a bespoke system from scratch.

For example, a software package which requires teachers to input frequent summative judgements on detailed elements of the curriculum (even at the level of 'can do' statements) will not be appropriate if the main priority is to focus on in-class formative assessment. The burden of gathering and inputting summative judgements on such a comprehensive basis would undermine the focus on formative classroom practice.

Is the assessment approach implied by the product credible?

In answering this question, schools should ask whether the product captures the right curriculum knowledge and understanding, whether the assessment judgements it implies make sense and whether it can be used effectively to inform teaching and lesson planning. The assessment judgements demanded by the database should provide an accurate and meaningful reflection of pupils' knowledge and understanding and there should be sufficient safeguards in place to ensure that data input into the system will be of a high quality.

Some assessment tools rely very heavily on statements of achievement drawn from the curriculum. For example, teachers may be required to judge pupils against a series of 'can-do' statements. Whilst such statements appear precise and detailed, they are actually capable of being interpreted in many different ways. "A statement like 'Can compare two fractions to identify which is larger' sounds precise, but whether pupils can do this or not depends on which fractions are selected. The Concepts in Secondary Mathematics and Science (CSMS) project investigated the achievement of a nationally representative group of secondary school pupils, and found out that when the fractions concerned were $\frac{3}{7}$ and $\frac{5}{7}$, around 90% of 14-year-olds answered correctly, but when more typical fractions, such as $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{4}{5}$ were used, 75% answered correctly. However, where the fractions concerned were $\frac{5}{7}$ and $\frac{5}{9}$, only around 15% answered correctly."¹²

Does the product provide good value?

As the product is likely to be just one element of the school's assessment system, schools should consider both the financial cost and any indirect costs, such as the workload cost of collecting and inputting the data. Schools should beware of adopting a commercially available product simply because it is convenient to do so, because it is cheap, or because it is packaged with other systems already in use. A product should only be adopted if it presents the best way to support delivery of the school's assessment policy.

Good practice

The Commission has seen good practice in a primary school that is developing an assessment system that uses short tests in key subjects. For example, comprehension questions in literacy, spellings and times tables tests and end-of-unit tests in maths. The marks, which will be used in place of levels, will be recorded by teachers in mark books (or spreadsheets); but not entered on a central data management system. The results of these tests will be used diagnostically as a starting point for discussions with parents, as well as in discussions with the leadership team to identify pupils who may need further support.

For pupils who may need further intervention, teachers will also complete an assessment form for review meetings to consider what additional support or intervention might be appropriate. Intervention will be woven into the system to ensure those who are falling behind receive targeted support in reading and number. It may include, for example, short daily one-to-one 'keep up' sessions. Alongside this, the school uses commercially produced standardised end-of-year tests in reading and mathematics, the marks for which are recorded centrally by the school.

Good practice

The Commission has seen good practice in a school which has a strong focus on day-to-day formative assessment and an open dialogue between teachers, pupils and parents. A range of formative assessment methods are used. For example, exit tickets may be used at the end of a lesson as a means of assessing prior understanding before teaching the next lesson. Each child could be asked to record a simple response that would nevertheless provide useful insight for the teacher. For example, 'Write down the most important things you know already about electricity'. Learning Review meetings are held between pupils, parents and teachers on a termly basis, in which pupils are given the opportunity to assess their own learning, provide exemplar work and discuss their progress. Pupils are helped to develop a good understanding of their goals and next steps. They are also encouraged to identify their own strengths and challenges and discuss these with their teachers as part of the yearly reporting process, after which all information is provided to their next teachers to inform future teaching and learning.

Accountability and inspection

While engaging with teachers, school leaders and teaching unions and associations, the Commission has repeatedly heard that schools' approaches to assessment and data management are driven by expectations of what Ofsted inspectors are looking for when they visit schools. Ofsted has played an active part in the work of the Commission, and this section of the report has been drafted in cooperation with the inspectorate to clarify its position on assessment and to demonstrate how it aligns with the Commission's views.

Ofsted is only one part of the national accountability framework. The inspectorate plays a role in holding schools to account alongside the publication of test and examinations data in performance tables, government-set floor standards, financial accountability, governance, and emerging forms of peer-to-peer review.

It is important that school leaders devise an approach to assessment that is effective in assessing the progress made by their pupils within their curriculum. School leaders should therefore not seek to devise a system that they think inspectors will want to see; it should be one that works for their pupils with the sole aim of supporting their achievement.

That said, clearly school leaders will want to know how inspection will consider the effectiveness of their school's curriculum and the underpinning assessment system, if not its form, under Ofsted's new Common Inspection Framework.

Inspectors will look at the effectiveness of a school's curriculum and assessment system in terms of the impact on pupils' achievement through the key judgement areas of the Common Inspection Framework.

Teaching, learning and assessment

When making judgements about the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which:

- assessment information is gathered from looking at what pupils already know, understand and can do, and is informed by their parents/previous providers as appropriate
- assessment information is used to plan appropriate teaching and learning strategies, including to identify pupils who are falling behind in their learning or who need additional support, enabling pupils to make good progress and achieve well
- except in the case of the very young, pupils understand how to improve as a result of useful feedback, written or oral, from teachers.

In evaluating the accuracy and impact of assessment, inspectors will consider how well:

- teachers use any assessment for establishing pupils' starting points, teacher assessment and testing to modify teaching so that pupils achieve their potential by the end of a year or key stage. However, Ofsted does not expect to see any particular system of assessment in place.
- assessment draws on a range of evidence of what pupils know, understand and can do across the school's own curriculum
- teachers make consistent judgements about pupils' progress and attainment, for example within a subject, across a year group and between year groups.

Leadership and management

When making judgements about the effectiveness of leadership and management, inspectors will consider:

- the effectiveness of the actions leaders take to secure and sustain improvements to teaching, learning and assessment
- how effectively leaders and governors monitor the progress of groups of pupils to ensure that none falls behind and underachieve, and how effectively governors hold them to account for this.

Outcomes for pupils

When making judgements about pupils' outcomes, inspectors will consider how well:

- pupils are making good progress towards meeting or exceeding the expected attainment for their age, as set out in the school's own curriculum and assessment policies
- all pupils are set challenging goals, given their starting points, and are making good progress towards meeting or exceeding these
- all pupils, including the most able, do work that deepens their knowledge, understanding and skills, rather than simply undertaking more work of the same difficulty or going on to study different content.

Inspectors will gather evidence about the progress of current pupils through:

- observations in lessons
- discussions with pupils about their understanding of things they have been learning about
- scrutiny of pupils' acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills over time as shown in their work, including that in their books
- the school's own information, taking account of the quality and rigour of the assessment on which it is based.

Ofsted has been very clear in its document, 'Ofsted inspections – clarification for schools', that unnecessary or extensive collections of marked pupils' work are not

required for inspection. It is equally clear that it does not expect performance information to be presented in a particular format. Such information should be provided to inspectors in the format that the school would ordinarily use to monitor the progress of pupils in that school.

Myths

“Ofsted wants to see lots of data to demonstrate and track progress.”

Inspectors will want to know how schools are assessing whether their pupils are making progress which is appropriate for their age and ability and is sufficiently challenging. Inspectors will gather information from observations in lessons, pupils’ work, discussions with pupils about their understanding and acquisition of knowledge, and the school’s own records. However, Ofsted will not expect any particular data outputs from a school’s assessment system.

“Ofsted has a preferred assessment system against which they will judge schools.”

Ofsted will not expect to see any particular type of assessment system in a school. It is important that each school develops a system that is consistent with its own curriculum and supports effective teaching and learning.

“My school will be penalised by Ofsted if it is still developing new assessment systems.”

Inspectors recognise that schools are at different stages in the development of assessment without levels, and will take this into account when considering how schools are monitoring the progress of pupils. Inspectors will want to understand how pupil progress is being assessed, and how the chosen systems are benefiting teaching and learning.

Ensuring a fully inclusive approach to assessment

A fully inclusive approach to assessment in all mainstream and specialist settings is one where policy and practice are designed to promote the outcomes of all pupils.

Assessment without levels will enable schools to articulate the progress of all pupils, including low attaining pupils and those with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities in a more individual way.

The principles of assessment set out at page 22 apply to all pupils, including those with SEN and disabilities. However, there are some further points of guidance which schools may find helpful to consider in ensuring their approaches to assessment are appropriate for pupils with SEN and disabilities. These points are reflected in the statutory Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice, 0 to 25 years. In thinking about their approach to assessment schools will also need to be mindful of their duties under the Equality Act 2010 which require them to improve equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.

Assessment should be inclusive of all abilities

Assessment needs to be holistic and consider long term wider outcomes such as higher education, employment and independent living. Schools should consider meaningful ways of measuring all aspects of progress including communication, social skills, physical development and independence. Assessment should reflect the extent to which a pupil can apply their learning in a wider range of contexts and enable teachers to determine what they need to do to ensure that the intervention and support provided enable children to progress in all areas of their learning and development.

High expectations

High expectations should apply equally to pupils with SEN and disabilities as to all other pupils. For many pupils with SEN and disabilities effort applied to learning is significant and assessment should recognise this alongside outcomes achieved whilst maintaining high aspirations and expectations.

For pupils working below national expected levels of attainment assessment arrangements must consider progress relative to starting points and take this into account, alongside the nature of pupils' learning difficulties.

Identification of special educational needs

Assessment should contribute to the early and accurate identification of children and young people's special educational needs and any requirements for support and intervention.

Pupils with SEN and disabilities will particularly benefit from the principle embodied in the new National Curriculum which advocates understanding key concepts before moving onto the next phase of learning. This should enable teachers to become better informed about pupils' individual learning needs. It should also better inform the teaching approaches and interventions they use to support pupils in making progress in their learning.

Both the SEN and Disability Code of Practice and Ofsted highlight the importance of assessing progress in wider areas, whilst maintaining high expectations. The school's assessment arrangements should build in the 'graduated approach' for pupils with SEN and disabilities (Assess, Plan, Do, Review). Teachers working with the SENCO should carry out a clear analysis of the pupil's needs. This should draw on any on-going formative and summative assessment, the views of parents and pupil and, where relevant, information from external specialists. Assessment should be designed to offer the next steps on each child's learning pathway and ensure a focus on long term outcomes in the areas of higher education and employment, independent living, participation in society and being as healthy as possible.

For some pupils with SEN and disabilities schools will need to consider the most effective methods and tools for formative and summative assessment. These may include adapting the use of questioning to give pupils with significant learning difficulties sufficient time to respond, using visual stimuli and alternative means of communication and observation. The same considerations apply in relation to engaging pupils with significant learning needs in feedback on their teaching and learning. The latter is an important aspect of learning for such pupils in order to help them develop greater autonomy and independence.

The Commission acknowledges that there are additional challenges for schools with significant numbers of pupils with complex needs in making judgements about what constitutes good attainment and progress. Many schools use P-Scales but there is limited comparative data available nationally for pupils who are not working at age-related expected levels and a need for consistency within and between schools in the approaches to and application of assessment arrangements. The Commission believes there is further work to be done in relation to assessment of lower attaining pupils and welcomes the Department's announcement to establish an expert review of assessment for pupils who are working below the level of the national curriculum tests.

“Class and subject teachers, supported by the senior leadership team, should make regular assessments of progress for all pupils. These should seek to identify pupils making less than expected progress given their age and individual circumstances.... It can include progress in areas other than attainment – for instance where a pupil needs to make additional progress with wider development or social needs in order to make a successful transition to adult life.”

The SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years

Teacher education

Perhaps the greatest barrier to embedding good assessment practices in schools is the variable quality of this area in initial teacher training (ITT) and continued professional development (CPD). The Carter Review¹³ of ITT, published earlier this year, identified assessment as the area of greatest weakness in current training programmes and high-quality professional development can be difficult for teachers to identify and access. Teachers report that time and money are the most significant barriers preventing them from undertaking high-quality professional development.

Initial teacher training (ITT)

The Carter Review argued that “of all areas of ITT content, we believe the most significant improvements are needed on training for assessment.” The Review team noted that Ofsted inspection reports indicate that insufficient attention is paid to trainees’ understanding of different types of assessment practice. In addition the 2014 NQT survey¹⁴ found that assessing pupils’ progress was one of the lowest rated aspects of teacher training for primary trainees. The weakness of current ITT provision was also noted in the NAHT’s report on assessment¹⁵:

“Evidence heard by the Commission was consistent in the view that, in terms of assessment, teacher training was not of a sufficiently high or rigorous standard. This applied across the board, from initial teacher training through to on-going professional development. With any change to the system, there needs to be sufficient support and development for teachers to allow them to adjust and adapt to the change. All teachers are not automatically equipped to assess, even though there is an apparent assumption that this is the case.”

This Commission agrees that the quality of assessment training is currently far too weak. This is not a new phenomenon. In 2007 a major research project¹⁶ into the experiences of Newly Qualified Teachers found that, at the end of their ITT courses, just 5% described “Knowledge / understanding of the principles of assessment for learning” as a strength of the teaching. By the end of their NQT year this had fallen to 2%. Moreover the NQTs highlighted “marking and assessment” as one of their top five reported professional development needs.

This problem has, to some extent, been masked by National Curriculum levels in that schools have not been required to think through their own assessment structures. The end of levels has revealed a worrying lack of knowledge and confidence in schools around the principles of assessment and the technical understanding required to enact them.

The Carter Review suggested the following topics should be covered within training on assessment:

- *The theories of assessment – why, when and how to assess*
- *Important concepts in assessment: validity, reliability, and utility*
- *Stages of development within subjects so new teachers know what to assess*
- *How to use a range of assessment approaches – including norm referencing, criterion referencing and standardised tests*
- *How to give effective feedback and the next steps for progression*
- *How to write “good questions” – i.e. how to design valid assessments*
- *Misconceptions and how to identify them through assessment*
- *How to use pupil data (including some training in basic statistics)*

The Commission agrees with this list and would reiterate for schools the importance of seeking and taking up opportunities to train staff in assessment. The first item on the list is perhaps the most important as it gives meaning and context to the more technical skills listed below. The Commission recommends that the Purposes and Principles of Assessment at page 18 are part of the core content given to all trainees when studying this topic.

The Commission also agrees with the Carter Review “that the link between ITT and professional development is often weak in the system.” Too often there is minimal career development in the NQT year and thereafter. While much can be done to improve the quality of ITT training in assessment, there is a limit to what can be achieved during an ITT course given the significant amount of other material new trainees need to learn. The Commission advocates the development of closer links between ITT and the first few years of teachers’ careers, particularly regarding assessment expertise.

Continuous professional development (CPD)

The three essential strands of teacher expertise relate to pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. The Commission believes that beyond ITT every teacher should have the opportunity to become skilled and confident at assessing pupils’ learning.

Within a changing landscape of teaching school alliances, school clusters, local authorities and academy groups, there is an opportunity for leading teachers to support local assessment practice. The Commission recognises the importance of system leaders enabling collaborative professional learning across local regions and suggests that high quality CPD endorsed by assessment experts from higher education institutions could be developed for delivery locally via regional groups such as teaching schools and local authorities. Where there are existing qualifications in educational assessment, the Commission recommends that these are advertised and promoted widely.

The members of the Commission are of the view that there should be an explicit expectation that school leaders and the Ofsted inspectorate develop a rigorous and shared understanding of all aspects of summative and formative educational assessment, confidently being able to explain technical aspects of data such as: ‘scaled scores’ and the strengths and weaknesses of assessment, including the nature and

prevalence of assessment error. There should also be a shared understanding of the importance of engaging pupils and parents in the assessment process. The use of a wide range of formative assessment as an embedded part of day-to-day pedagogy is an important aspect of this.

Good practice

Pupils should be given high quality feedback to support and involve them properly in their learning. When visiting schools the Commission has seen pupils who can articulate what they have learned and how they need to progress – not in terms of a defined rubric, level or target, but by demonstrating a real understanding of where they need to focus their efforts, gained from effective question and answer between the teacher and pupil.

The Commission recognises that engaging pupils with significant learning difficulties in feedback can sometimes be more challenging. Approaches that encourage self-assessment and self-reflection need to be adequately adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils, including for those who use alternative or augmentative methods of communication. One example is the use of visual learning journals, where pupils can see their progress in a concrete way. The reinforcement of self-assessment skills is a crucial goal for pupils with significant learning difficulties, whose personal learning targets may often include autonomy and independence. For pupils to be able to self-assess themselves accurately, they require an element of competence in the area being assessed, so the ability to self-assess is an important goal in itself.

Next steps and recommendations

The Commission recognises that many schools are just beginning the journey towards assessment without levels. This summer will be the last time that statutory national test results and teacher assessment are reported in the form of national curriculum levels. The Commission encourages schools to embrace this change and seize the opportunity to develop innovative and effective new approaches to assessment that meet the needs of their pupils, parents, staff and curriculum.

The Commission hopes this report will be helpful in supporting schools on their journey towards developing new systems of assessment, but recognises that to ensure the success of these journeys and to embed and share effective new practices, further support may be needed. The creation and implementation of alternative approaches to assessment will need to be reinforced by opportunities for teachers to build their expertise in assessment and by genuine culture change in thinking about the purposes and means of assessment.

Over time, the successful transition to assessment without levels should be measurable in a number of ways.

- Pupils should develop a better understanding of how they are doing and where they need to target their efforts to progress. This should foster a sense of responsibility for their own learning and should result in more meaningful dialogue between pupil and teacher about the pupil's attainment and progress
- Parents should be able to see the link between the school's curriculum and the information they receive about their child's attainment and progress. Discussions with teachers should provide more helpful information about what their child knows and understands and should help to clarify how they, as parents, can support their child's continued progression.
- Teachers should feel a growing confidence in using assessment to better inform their teaching practices and lesson planning. Over time, new forms of assessment should become an integral part of day-to-day teaching, avoiding the need for unnecessary tracking and recording. Teachers should see a greater responsiveness in pupils to assessment feedback as a reflection of the effectiveness of the new practices.
- The link between the three components of teacher expertise – curriculum, pedagogy and assessment – will be stronger. School leaders will be assured that both pedagogy and assessment are being used to ensure that the full curriculum is being delivered effectively and is being accessed by all pupils.
- Together, the changes above should result in greater professional expertise in assessment, overall improvements in teaching practice, improved engagement between parents and school and improved outcomes for pupils.

The Commission has considered what further support may be needed following the publication of its report to help schools achieve this success. The Commission's proposals are set out below.

Implementation and advocacy

The Commission believes there is a need for continued advocacy for effective assessment without levels. It is important that the purposes, principles and guidance within this report are disseminated widely to raise awareness of good practice and to highlight the important role that assessment without levels plays in effective educational practice.

It is particularly important to ensure that individuals and organisations who work closely with schools, such as Regional School Commissioners, Local Authorities and Ofsted are equipped to identify good practice and provide advice or support to schools where required. These bodies and individuals should be able to build a picture of how schools are progressing in their journey to assessment without levels and share lessons learned across the system.

The Commission recommends the appointment of a standing committee on assessment, supported by a panel of experts. The committee could call on the experts to provide advice when required, to oversee the next phase of implementation and to have continuing stewardship of assessment development. Through its chair, the committee would work closely with Regional School Commissioners, Local Authorities, Ofsted and the DfE to help build the assessment expertise. The chair and members of the committee would be available to attend conferences and events as part of a programme of engagement and dissemination to share information with teachers and school leaders and maintain oversight of the long-term impact on teacher workload. The committee would also be able to offer advice on assessment to ministers.

Teacher education

The Commission has set out its views on the importance of both high quality initial teacher training and continuing professional development to help build expertise in assessment. This report has identified the Commission's concerns about the fragmented system of training and development that currently exists. The Commission recommends that any Government review of initial teacher training ensures that assessment is included in the core content for teacher training and includes all the topics proposed by the Carter review, outlined at page 40 of this report. This core content, in particular the theories of assessment, should be informed by the principles outlined at page 22 of this report.

The Commission believes there should be greater continuity between initial teacher training and continuous professional development as a cohesive phase of early career

development. The Commission recommends that the Government considers funding a suitable training course for one person within each Teaching School alliance.

There should be an expectation that this person will become a Specialist Leader in Education (SLE) on assessment for their alliance. Organisations providing these courses should be funded to develop more accessible online courses in the basics of assessment that could also be a means of supporting school-based in-service training.

Together these changes would help to ensure that teachers and school leaders develop a rigorous understanding of all aspects of summative and formative educational assessment to inform continuous improvement and support the highest standards of educational practice.

Shared information and resources

The Commission recognises that schools would welcome channels for sharing ideas and accessing resources they can be confident reflect good practice.

The Commission recommends the establishment of a national item bank of assessment questions. The questions would provide a flexible resource for use in both formative and summative assessment. They could be used formatively in the classroom to support effective question and answer, enabling teachers to evaluate understanding of a topic or concept. The item bank would also provide the functionality to allow teachers to create bespoke tests for summative assessment at the end of a topic or teaching period.

The Commission notes that to be effective for assessment for teaching and learning, an item bank would have to be just one of a range of tools that teachers use and should not be used for high-stakes testing.

The Commission also recommends the creation of a dedicated online forum where teachers can share their ideas on assessment without levels and seek suggestions or help from each other. Peer to peer support and challenge are effective ways of improving practice and the Commission recommends that the Department explores ways in which opportunities for this may be provided.

Inspection and accountability

The Commission acknowledges that many schools have concerns about Ofsted's expectations in relation to assessment without levels. This report has aimed to highlight the consistency between the Commission's views and Ofsted's approach to inspection. However, there are likely to remain some misconceptions about the requirements Ofsted have of schools' assessment practices. There may also be Ofsted inspectors who have been working within the system of levels for many years who may need support in developing an understanding of what to look for when inspecting schools assessing without levels.

The Commission therefore recommends the development of a training module, which can be used by both senior leaders in schools and Ofsted inspectors to ensure a shared understanding of the principles and purposes of assessment, what good practice looks like and how it can be demonstrated in schools. This training course should also be available to Regional School Commissioners and Local Authorities to ensure join up across the system.

In disseminating its work, the Commission would welcome the opportunity to work closely with Ofsted inspectors, particularly during the 2015/16 academic year, to support their training and provide assurance to schools of their shared approach to assessment without levels.

School data management

The Commission welcomes the Department for Education's decision to establish a review group on school data management as part of its strategy for tackling unnecessary teacher workload. The Commission is aware that the Department is keen to ensure continuity between the work of the Commission and that of the new group.

The Commission recommends that this group helps to build the evidence base to understand how schools are using assessment data and what drives their data management practices. The Commission also recommends that the group follows up the Data Collection and Reporting section at page 30 of this report to provide further practical advice to support schools in evaluating the value achieved by collecting assessment data, identifying how they can reduce the workload it generates and understanding how they can develop effective, reliable and efficient approaches to collecting and reporting assessment data.

Assessment for all

The Commission has given consideration to pupils with special educational needs and disabilities throughout its work. To support its discussions, the Commission convened a workshop to bring together experts in the field of special educational needs to identify any issues or challenges associated with assessing this group of pupils and to ensure this report represented their interests.

The Commission believes that the principles of assessment set out in this report are applicable to all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. However, the Commission recognises that assessing pupils with complex needs and those with very low attainment can be more complicated than assessing other pupils and that implementing the principles of assessment may sometimes need to be approached differently.

For this reason, the Commission welcomes the Government's decision to establish an expert group on assessment for pupils who are working below the level of the national

curriculum tests. This will provide the opportunity for more detailed consideration of the factors that need to be taken into account when assessing these pupils.

The Commission recommends a holistic look at current assessment methods, including P-Scales to ensure the best advice is provided for schools working with pupils with complex needs.

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- ² Oates, T. (2010). Could do better, using international comparisons to refine the National Curriculum in England Cambridge Assessment
- ³ STA has published guidance on scaled scores which is available on gov.uk.
- ⁴ Although the Commission committed at the outset to provide information to help clarify the legal and regulatory requirements for assessment, it has been agreed that the Department for Education will provide this information separately as part of a broader package of communications which will confirm arrangements for changes being introduced from autumn 2015.
- ⁵ For more information on the forms of assessment, see the section on “Purposes and Principles of Assessment” at Page 18.
- ⁶ There are a number of references to parents throughout this report. Where the Commission refers to parents, it should be considered to refer to both parents and carers, even where not specifically stated.
- ⁷ NETCM Mastery approaches to mathematics and the new national curriculum. Available [here](#).
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- ¹¹ Respondents to the Workload Challenge Survey were self-selecting so the results should not be read as being representative of the overall school workforce.
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Annex

Commission members

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