



Department
for Education



Standards
& Testing
Agency

Performance descriptors for key stage 1 and 2 statutory teacher assessment

Government consultation response

February 2015

Contents

Introduction	3
Summary of consultation responses received and Government Response	5
Main findings from the consultation	5
Government response	7
Annex A: Results of the public consultation	8

Introduction

In March 2014, as part of the Government’s response to the “Reforming Assessment and Accountability for Primary Schools” consultation, we announced that we were developing detailed performance descriptors for key subjects (Reading, Writing, Maths and Science) to inform teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. We stated that the performance descriptors would be available for use from the 2015/16 academic year onwards.

We also confirmed that the performance descriptors would be directly linked to the content of the new national curriculum.

The Standards and Testing Agency (STA) led on the development of the draft performance descriptors. These performance descriptors were drafted and reviewed by experts, including teachers, representatives from Local Authorities, curriculum and subject experts, Ofsted and Ofqual.

An eight week online public consultation on draft performance descriptors for end of key stage teacher assessment was launched on 23 October and closed on 18 December 2014. The purpose of the consultation was to seek views on the practical use and implementation of the draft performance descriptors to help us refine and finalise them prior to publication of the final performance descriptors alongside exemplification materials by September 2015. We received 880 responses to the consultation, with the majority (69%) from teachers. The breakdown of respondents is as follows:

Respondent type	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Teachers	611	69%
Schools	60	7%
Governors	20	2%
Local Authorities	41	5%
Parents	17	2%
Other	131	15%
Total	880	100%

The consultation questionnaire requested yes/no answers, as well as free text to allow respondents to express their views freely on the draft performance descriptors. This

Government response includes the most substantive views received; primarily those for which 10% or more of respondents commented.

The rationale for performance descriptors

The new national curriculum, which was introduced in September 2014, sets high expectations for what teachers should teach, and gives them the freedom to decide how to teach. We trust teachers to use their professional judgement in deciding which approaches work best for their pupils. We have taken the same approach to assessment; we are setting high standards for what pupils should be able to achieve at the end of key stages, but between these points it is for schools to decide how to assess pupils against their curriculum.

As part of our reforms, we have abolished the system of national curriculum levels in the new programmes of study. Levels were intended to provide a universal framework to ensure that schools were measuring attainment and progress consistently. However, over time, it became clear that the level descriptors, which were not closely related to curriculum content, were ambiguous and open to different interpretations.

There will continue to be statutory national tests (with results reported as a scaled score) and teacher assessments at the end of key stages 1 and 2 in key subjects. Performance descriptors were drafted to support teachers in making these assessments effectively and consistently, following the removal of levels.

Teacher assessments will be used as part of the new progress measure for the new primary floor standard from 2016. While many primary schools will have progress measured from a reception baseline, for junior schools key stage 1 assessments of reading, writing and mathematics will form the baseline. Key stage 2 teacher assessments of writing (alongside test results in reading and mathematics) will be used to judge the progress children have made by the end of primary school. To ensure that a broad picture of children's attainment is maintained, teacher assessment will also be statutory for science at key stage 1, and for reading, mathematics and science at key stage 2. However, the teacher assessment of these subjects will not form part of the new floor standard.

Summary of consultation responses received and Government Response

This section sets out the main findings from the consultation and the Government's response. The percentages quoted in this section are based on responses received across the whole consultation. Further details of the responses to the consultation can be found at Annex A.

Main findings from the consultation

A number of conflicting views and opinions were expressed in response to the consultation. There was a general consensus amongst respondents that a framework was needed for statutory end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 assessment. However, opinions differed as to the exact form this should take.

Concerns about the performance descriptors proposed in the consultation focused primarily on the following issues:

Performance descriptor names

A significant proportion of respondents (74%) felt that the names of the draft performance descriptors would not allow teachers and parents to understand the meaning of, and difference between, each performance descriptor. Some respondents (33%) felt that the names were difficult to understand - in particular the difference between 'working towards' and 'working below' standards, as these seemed to overlap. A similar proportion (36%) felt that the performance descriptor labels were not appropriate, with 15% expressing concern that the proposed names of descriptors might lead to the unhelpful labelling of children.

Range and structure of performance descriptors

Some respondents were content with the range of the performance descriptors. However, the majority (76%) felt that performance descriptors were not spaced effectively across the range of pupils' performance to support accurate and consistent judgement. Almost a quarter of respondents (24%) thought that the range was too vague. There was a general consensus that having different numbers of descriptors for different subjects and key stages could be confusing. On this point, 24% of respondents felt that all subjects should have the same number of performance descriptors. However, there was no clear agreement on the appropriate number. Several respondents (36%) were concerned that parental reporting would be made more difficult for teachers as a result of parents struggling to understand the existing draft performance descriptors framework. There was also concern from 13% of respondents that the current performance descriptors framework did not adequately address the issue of how the

performance descriptors would work for lower attaining pupils, particularly those with special educational needs (SEN).

Clarity and number of performance descriptor statements

Although there were some respondents who felt that the statements were clear and helped them to identify what pupils needed to achieve to meet a certain standard, the majority of respondents (69%) felt that the descriptors are not clear and easy to understand. 32% of respondents felt that the language used in the descriptors was ambiguous and 43% felt that it was unclear how the descriptors allowed for the measuring of progress. Some respondents (15%) were concerned that the ambiguity of language used within some of the performance descriptor statements leaves them open to interpretation/manipulation and therefore risks reduced consistency in teacher assessment across the system.

There were also some concerns raised in relation to the number of statements contained within each performance descriptor. Some respondents (16%) felt that there were too many wordy statements which would increase the time and workload demands on teachers in interpreting and applying them.

Alignment of content of performance descriptors to the new national curriculum

There were mixed views with regard to the performance descriptors reflecting the new national curriculum; 38% of respondents agreed that the performance descriptors reflected the new national curriculum, 39% disagreed and 16% were not sure. Most of those who disagreed, acknowledged that majority of the statements were in line with the new national curriculum but pointed to only a few of the statements which they felt were either taken from the non-statutory elements of the new national curriculum or had been worded differently. There was some concern that the performance descriptor statements were simply restating the national curriculum rather than being ways of assessing attainment of it.

Some respondents were concerned that the 'National standard' is too high and therefore would mean that more children will fall short of meeting the expected standard.

Best fit model vs secure fit model and consistency in teacher assessment

Although the majority of respondents did not cite the existing 'best-fit' model as an issue in itself, some respondents (28%) felt that the 'best-fit' model was unhelpful and would lead to inconsistency in teacher assessment across schools and could make benchmarking difficult nationally. 8% of respondents were also concerned that the existing performance descriptors resembled the old Levels system to some extent.

Government response

We acknowledge the concerns raised by respondents in relation to the proposed performance descriptors. Many of the issues raised by respondents regarding the names, structure and content of performance descriptors amount to a request for greater simplicity, clarity and consistency to support teachers in applying performance descriptors and to help parents understand their meaning.

However, we also note that a number of concerns raised reflect the fact that there are some stakeholders who valued the levels system and would like performance descriptors to function in a similar way across the key stages, which is not their intention.

The removal of levels was based on the principle that schools are best placed to develop their own high-quality formative assessment systems, which are diagnostic and which are not necessarily nationally referenced. The intention of the performance descriptors is to provide summative assessment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 only. They are not intended to inform ongoing assessment.

Responses to the consultation, however, have raised concerns that performance descriptors could be applied to formative assessment in a way that is not intended .

As a result of some of the conflicting responses to the consultation, we will work with relevant experts to determine the most appropriate course of action to address the concerns raised and will inform schools of the agreed approach according to the timetable set out in the consultation document - i.e. by September 2015.

In the meantime, and to help with this, the Government is establishing a Commission on Assessment Without Levels to collate, quality assure, publish and share best practice in assessment with schools across the country. This will help schools to identify the most effective systems for their pupils and staff. It will highlight the great work that is already being done in many schools and will help to foster innovation and success in assessment practice more widely.

The members of the Commission will comprise assessment experts whose combined experience will be invaluable in providing advice and support to both the Government and schools on good assessment practice.

The Commission will be chaired by John McIntosh CBE. A former headmaster of the London Oratory School, John McIntosh has served as a member of the Health Education Council, the National Curriculum Council, the Teacher Standards Review, the Teaching Agency Advisory Group and the National College for School Leadership Advisory Board. He was a member of DfE's National Curriculum Review Advisory Committee and has been an external expert on free schools interview panels since 2012.

The Commission will have its inaugural meeting in March 2015 and will publish a statement of its intended outputs by the end of the month.

Annex A: Results of the public consultation

880 respondents contributed to the consultation on performance descriptors for key stage 1 and 2 statutory teacher assessment. The tables below set out data on the respondent types and responses received for each of the consultation questions. When adding up the percentages of Yes/No/Not sure responses to a particular question, this may not add up to 100% - the difference is made up of those who did not respond to the question.

Consultation Questions

Question 1: Do the names of the draft performance descriptors allow teachers and parents to understand the meaning of, and differentiate between, each performance descriptor? If no, please provide details.

There were 849 responses to this question.

Options	Responses		Across Consultation
No	655	77%	74%
Yes	140	16%	16%
Not Sure	54	6%	6%
Key Indicators:			
Inappropriate labelling	315	37.1 %	35.8 %
'Working towards' and 'Below' standards differentiation issue	270	31.8 %	30.7 %
Need equal no. of PDs per subject	212	25.0 %	24.1 %
Unclear	230	27.1 %	26.1 %
Difficult to understand	294	34.6 %	33.4 %

Question 2: Are the performance descriptors spaced effectively across the range of pupils' performance to support accurate and consistent judgements? If no, please provide details.

There were 841 responses to this question.

Options	Responses		Across Consultation
No	673	80%	76%
Yes	93	11%	11%
Not Sure	75	9%	9%
Key Indicators:			
Below/SEND issue	117	13.9 %	13.3 %
Vague	208	24.7 %	23.6 %
Spacing irrelevant for subjects with 1 PD	171	20.3 %	19.4 %
Unhelpful best-fit model	249	29.6 %	28.3 %

Question 3: In your opinion, are the performance descriptors clear and easy to understand? If no, which bullets lack sufficient clarity to allow for effective teacher assessment?

There were 826 responses to this question.

Options	Responses		Across Consultation
No	604	73%	69%
Yes	152	18%	17%
Not Sure	70	8%	8%
Key Indicators:			
Measuring progress unclear	377	45.6 %	42.8 %
Repetitive/too much cross over	71	8.6 %	8.1 %
Ambiguous language	277	33.5 %	31.5 %
Too wordy/long	141	17.1 %	16.0 %

Question 4: In your opinion, does the content of the performance descriptors adequately reflect the national curriculum programmes of study? If no, please state what amendments are required.

There were 821 responses to this question.

Options	Responses		Across Consultation
No	343	42%	39%
Yes	338	41%	38%
Not Sure	140	17%	16%
Key Indicators:			
Not fully reflective of NC	152	18.5 %	17.3 %
May encourage narrow focus	36	4.4 %	4.1 %
Open to misinterpretation/misuse/manipulation	131	16.0 %	14.9 %
Too many statements	141	17.2 %	16.0 %

Question 5: Should any element of the performance descriptors be weighted (i.e. should any element be considered more important or less important than others?). If yes, please detail which performance descriptor(s), which element(s) and why.

There were 782 responses to this question.

Options	Responses		Across Consultation
Yes	396	51%	45%
No	260	33%	30%
Not Sure	126	16%	14%
Key Indicators:			

Reading – Comprehension	38	4.9 %	4.3 %
Writing – Composition, less emphasis on spelling	129	16.5 %	14.7 %
Maths – Number, Place value	156	19.9 %	17.7 %
Science – Working scientifically	68	8.7 %	7.7 %

Question 6: If you have any further comments regarding the performance descriptors, please provide details. For example, is there further supporting information that would be helpful in understanding and using the performance descriptors?

There were 620 responses to this question.

	Responses		Across Consultation
Key Indicators:			
Too vague/ambiguous/not fit for purpose	289	46.6 %	32.8 %
Tick box exercise	64	10.3 %	7.3 %
Same no of PDs needed	164	26.5 %	18.6 %
Extra Workload for teachers	137	22.1 %	15.6 %
Reporting/understanding difficult	314	50.6 %	35.7 %
PDs are the same as Levels	65	10.5 %	7.4 %
Unhelpful labelling of children	130	21.0 %	14.8 %
PDs for all year groups needed	672	10.0 %	7.0 %



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