



### THE ASSESSMENT PROBLEM

- 1 Assessment in Britain requires a radical review. The introduction of modular AS examinations in 2000-01 highlighted the problem of adding new external examinations to an already over-examined system. There is widespread agreement that young people in England and Wales are subjected to far too many external examinations and that the extent of these examinations has a damaging effect on the quality of education in schools and colleges. In the words of Professor Harry Torrance,

*To use an engineering metaphor, it seems that we are beginning to 'test the system to destruction'. Well, that's all very well when we want to know how much force the materials in a bridge can withstand, but it hardly seems appropriate to the future building blocks of our society – our children. (Torrance, 2002)*

- 2 There is less consensus on how the system of external examinations should be reformed. This paper sets out a programme of reform that is both practical and radical. The proposed measures could be introduced over a five-year period, with some reforms being introduced more quickly.
- 3 This paper does not argue against assessment. Far from it. High quality assessment is an important part of good teaching. As we argue below, however, the purposes of assessment have become confused. This has happened largely because external examinations have assumed too much importance in the system. Examinations have become the master of education, not the servant.
- 4 Recent research has shown that examinations are a less precise science than the public is led to believe and that too much confidence has been placed in the detailed results by those who use them to make judgements, both on the performance of individual pupils and on the performance of the school system as a whole. (Black and Wiliam, 2002)
- 5 There are historical lessons about over-reliance on high stakes testing, as well as evidence from the modern era. Teachers have always set goals for their pupils, based on the demands of the examination syllabus. The higher the stakes in the examination, the stronger is the concentration on the limited goals of the test. Under the Revised Code in the nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold HMI described the school examinations as “*a game of mechanical contrivance in which the teachers will and must learn how to beat us*” (Report, 1864-65) and Joshua Fitch HMI commented that the Revised Code was:

*tending to formalize the work of elementary schools, and to render it in some degree lifeless, inelastic and mechanical. Too many teachers narrow their sense of duty to the six Standards, or what they sometimes call the paying subjects. (Report, 1864-65)*

- 6 The current school performance tables, which summarize age-related achievement at 11, 14, 16 and 18, impose perverse incentives on schools. At GCSE, resources are often concentrated on pupils at the C/D borderline, sometimes to the detriment of those who could perhaps raise a grade B to an A, or an E to a D. The performance tables dictate that many pupils have to be entered for examinations when they are not ready for them. We need to move away from age-relatedness of examinations.
- 7 As Torrance notes, national curriculum test scores improve each year because teachers ensure that pupils practise for the tests. The same is surely true of GCSE and Advanced level. International evidence, notably from the US, also indicates that high stakes testing raises test scores without necessarily improving knowledge and understanding. (Torrance, 2002) The random sampling tests carried out by the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) were a more effective way of monitoring national standards.
- 8 The 2002 Annual Report of HMCI, Mike Tomlinson, observed that

*in some primary schools the arts, creative and practical subjects are receiving less attention than previously. This risks an unacceptable narrowing of the curriculum. (Ofsted, 2002)*

If educational standards are defined more broadly than literacy, numeracy and science, HMCI's observation suggests that standards are being reduced, rather than improved, by the present testing regime. (Torrance, 2002)

- 9 The national performance tables in their present form, even when recording value added in addition to raw scores, have no part to play in the progressive assessment structure outlined in this paper. Many alternative ways of making schools accountable for their performance exist.
- 10 The government's proposals for a post-14 qualifications structure will be threatened if the current weight of examinations for 17 and 18 year olds is replicated in reforms for students aged 15 and 16. Unless we change the examinations system, we cannot build the progressive structure of curriculum and qualifications that the government has proposed. The 14-19 Green Paper mentions assessment and examinations in so far as they contribute to league tables as drivers of improved performance. Otherwise, it largely ignores assessment and examinations. Successful reform of the qualifications structure for this age group depends heavily on reform of the examinations system and the Green Paper does nothing to move us away from our national obsession with levels and grades at every age.

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### THE NEED TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF EXAMINATIONS

- 11 Young people are subjected to far too many external examinations. The total number of examination papers sat by young people in schools and colleges in 2002 in national curriculum tests at 7, 11 and 14, GCSE examinations, AS and A2 examinations and key skills tests is over 30 million. No other country has so many examinations, taking place so frequently in the life of a young person. Fewer examinations would not mean worse. Indeed, SHA believes that fewer examinations could lead to an improved education system.
- 12 Under the pressure of the present system, schools and colleges spend too much valuable curriculum time in directly preparing for, and conducting, external examinations.
- 13 The examination system is very costly, taking too high a proportion of available funding in schools and colleges. A typical secondary school of 1000 pupils, including a sixth form, is spending around £100,000 per year on external examinations. A typical sixth form college is spending around £180,000.
- 14 The three awarding bodies are buckling under the pressure of the system. Unacceptable administrative errors have increased greatly in the last two years. The underlying cause of this increase has been the rapid expansion of the number of examinations during this period.
- 15 The complexity of the examination system has led to an increased number of errors in marking and results. Appeals are not dealt with efficiently.
- 16 It is becoming impossible to find sufficient markers, moderators and examiners.
- 17 The problem of over-reliance on external examinations is illustrated by the fact that bright children take over 100 examinations during their school career.
- 18 The national obsession with tests and grading is illustrated by the daft proposal that national tests for 7 year olds will include starred grades "*to differentiate the very highest performers from the merely excellent*".
- 19 The chief inspector of independent schools – a very experienced ex-HMI – reports that *examination overload "threatens to turn education from an intellectual and spiritual adventure into a treadmill"*. (Tony Hubbard)

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### A CONFUSION OF PURPOSE

- 20 There is considerable confusion about the purposes of external examinations and assessment. In particular, the purpose of examining the student has become confused with school accountability and the performance management of teachers. The same assessments are used for the following purposes, as cited in the TGAT Report (DES, 1988):

- Diagnostic assessment

- Formative assessment
- Summative assessment
- Evaluative assessment

They are also used for:

- Component of the qualifications structure
- Progress monitoring
- Teachers' performance-related pay
- School performance tables
- Meeting national targets

Of the last group of five purposes, three are evaluative, demonstrating how the government has skewed the assessment system from its prime purposes of diagnostic and formative towards the evaluative.

- 21 No single assessment tool can be applied effectively in so many ways. There needs to be much greater clarity about the purpose of each assessment.
- 22 The recent furore over Advanced level grades has highlighted the confusion at Advanced level and GCSE between *norm-referenced* assessment and *criterion-referenced* assessment. This has been apparent to many chief examiners since the late 1980s.

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## ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

- 23 A fundamental review of assessment should seek to promote a move from *assessment of learning* to *assessment for learning*, which focuses more strongly on the needs of the learner than the needs of the system. It seeks to promote pupils' learning, rather than act as a measure of accountability. (This section is based on Black et al, 2002)
- 24 *Assessment for learning* is formative assessment, producing evidence for teachers and pupils that leads to modifications in both teaching and learning. Black and Wiliam (1998) demonstrate clearly how formative assessment raises standards. *Assessment for learning* is used widely in the government's key stage 3 strategy.
- 25 Key features of *assessment for learning* include
  - more effective questioning techniques by the teacher;
  - increasing the waiting time for answers from pupils in class;
  - feedback from teacher to pupil by comments, instead of marks or grades;
  - feedback that causes pupils to think;
  - more self-assessment by pupils;
  - peer-assessment as a complement to self-assessment;
  - the formative use of summative tests.
- 26 To ensure consistency, more emphasis should be placed on training in a range of assessment methods for teachers, both in initial training and in-service training courses. This is an imperative when major changes, such as *assessment for learning*, are introduced.

- 27 So much of the current debate about assessment is divorced from the student's learning process. The work of Black and Wiliam is refreshing in bringing the focus of the debate back to the central issue of learning.

### NEW METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

- 28 In recent years, teachers have become more rigorous and skilful at assessment. The government should place greater trust in the professionalism of teachers. Internal summative assessment should play a greater part in the examination system.
- 29 One way to increase the proportion of internal assessment is to have a massive programme of moderation, but this would be unduly bureaucratic and would take moderators (who would mostly be serving teachers) out of their own schools for too much of the summer term.
- 30 Another way to solve the present examinations crisis is to have a cadre of professional salaried examiners and moderators who are not serving teachers. The seasonal nature of examinations may make this an inefficient way of proceeding. Nevertheless, this is worth investigating, as part-time salaried examiner posts may be attractive to teachers at the end of their career in the classroom.
- 31 The use of online assessment is likely to increase, as online techniques become increasingly sophisticated and cost-effective. As a supplement to other forms of assessment, national item banks of well developed assessment tools could be made available for current and future testing arrangements, such as national curriculum tests, GCSE and AS. These item banks could be used to complement teachers' judgements of levels and grades achieved. Online assessment is good at testing knowledge and, to a lesser extent, understanding, but it is not so good at testing analytical ability and other higher order skills. It should be noted, therefore, that the results produced by online assessment do not always correlate exactly with the results of other forms of assessment. Nevertheless, online assessment has an important part to play, although the practicalities of organising online testing in schools should be considered carefully.
- 32 At ages 7 and 14, teacher assessments, supported by online test scores, should be reported to parents, but not used to compile performance tables

### CHARTERED EXAMINERS

- 33 A problem with relying more on internal assessment by teachers is that there is a lack of trust in the professional ability of teachers to carry out such assessment rigorously. A change in the balance between external and internal assessment must take place in a way that maintains public confidence in the qualifications system.
- 34 SHA's scheme for the establishment of a cohort of Chartered Examiners would produce no loss of rigour in examining and would thus hold public confidence. The SHA proposals are set out in the Annex. These should be piloted and, if successful, adopted nationally as soon as practicable.
- 35 The proposal to create Chartered Examiners will raise the status of teachers and of internal assessment in schools and colleges. It will improve the quality of school-based assessment and thus contribute to the raising of achievement in schools and colleges. It will provide a new step on the continuum of professional development for teachers. It will provide important professional development opportunities for aspiring classroom teachers. It will make just-in-time testing more viable and reduce the length of the examination period each summer. Above all, it would make the examinations system more manageable.
- 36 With Chartered Examiners in place, the GCSE and AS examinations could rely more on internal assessment by teachers. Assessment instruments could be externally set and internally marked by (or under the supervision of) Chartered Examiners. Instruments could also be internally set. Grades could be recommended internally from a combination of internal and external assessment instruments. A2 papers should remain predominantly external examinations, with coursework where appropriate.

## NATIONAL MONITORING

- 37 National curriculum testing should not be used to monitor progress towards the achievement of national targets. The pressure of high stakes testing creates a false picture. The random sampling tests carried out by the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) should be reintroduced. Monitoring of progress should be by national sampling, not by national saturation, as we have at present.

## REFERENCES

- Black, P, and Wiliam, D, *Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment*, King's College, London, 1998
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- Ofsted, *Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England 2000-01*, HMSO, 2002
- Report of the Committee of Council on Education, 1864-65
- Torrance, H, *Can testing really raise educational standards?*, Inaugural lecture, University of Sussex, June 2002

### ANNEX

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#### PROPOSAL TO CREATE CHARTERED EXAMINER STATUS

- 1 A new Chartered Examiner status is introduced for experienced teachers.
- 2 If greater reliance is to be placed on internal assessment by teachers as a component of externally awarded qualifications, this must be achieved with no loss of rigour.
- 3 The internal assessment is therefore carried out by teachers who uphold, and are seen to uphold, the standards set by the government, QCA and awarding bodies.

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#### ACCREDITATION OF CHARTERED EXAMINERS

- 4 Chartered Examiner status is available to qualified teachers with at least four years' experience of teaching the subject in which they are to be accredited.
- 5 Teachers applying for accreditation as Chartered Examiners take part in three to five days of training and testing, administered by the awarding bodies. Much of this involves the marking of candidates' work and the estimation of grades. Only teachers achieving a high standard of consistency in this work are accredited as Chartered Examiners.
- 6 The status of Chartered Examiner is granted by the awarding bodies and is publicly recognised with a post-nominal C.Ex.
- 7 The status is awarded at Advanced level for those conducting assessments at A level and AVCE; at Intermediate level for those conducting assessments at GCSE and vocational GCSE; at Foundation level for those conducting key stage 3 assessments.
- 8 It is for consideration whether teachers awarded the status at Advanced level need to be separately accredited at Intermediate and Foundation levels.
- 9 The proposal could be extended to teachers of children at key stages 1 and 2.
- 10 The status of Chartered Examiner will be awarded to teachers in maintained and independent schools and colleges.
- 11 Precedents exist for the proposals in this paper, both in the D32 to D35 qualifications for teachers who assess vocational courses, and in the accreditation awarded to modern languages teachers to carry out A level and GCSE speaking tests. In each case, teachers apply for the accreditation and undergo training and testing for one or more days. The awarding bodies administer the process and award the accreditation.

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#### OPERATION OF A SYSTEM OF CHARTERED EXAMINERS

- 12 It is envisaged that each large subject department of a secondary school or college will have several Chartered Examiners. These teachers will be responsible for carrying out or overseeing rigorous internal assessment that would form a substantial proportion of externally awarded qualifications.
- 13 The work to be assessed by the Chartered Examiners will be of two types:
  - i. externally set tests or assignments, and
  - ii. internally set assignments on specified parts of the syllabus.
- 14 If a department does not have a Chartered Examiner in a particular subject, the school or college may use a Chartered Examiner from another institution or may send the work to the awarding body for external marking.

- 15 It is the responsibility of the Chartered Examiner to mark and grade work at the standard of the external qualification to which it contributes.
- 16 A senior Chartered Examiner will be appointed in each school to oversee the whole assessment process.
- 17 A small amount of moderation of the work of Chartered Examiners could take place each year. Moderation systems tend to be very bureaucratic and time consuming. The extent and procedures of the moderation must avoid this excessive bureaucracy.
- 18 The proposed increase in internal examining is subject to the criticism that it will increase the workload of teachers. This should not be the case. If year 12 is taken as an example, the experience of 2000-01 suggests that the weight of external examinations has caused additional stress and workload. Yet year 12 students have always been given internal examinations by their teachers without these problems. Unless the new system is introduced with excessive bureaucracy, a more rigorous form of internal assessment will add little to the workload of a typical teacher of year 12 students.
- 19 Chartered Examiner status will be renewable every three years.
- 20 Chartered Examiner status (as was the case with a good honours degree) will be appropriately rewarded with a salary supplement.
- 21 The cost of the proposals has not been calculated, but any additional cost will be offset by the reduction in external examinations, which are expensive consumers of resources.

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Young people are subjected to far too many external examinations. (Paragraph 11)
- 2 Greater clarity is needed about the purpose of each examination and assessment instrument. (Paragraph 20-22)
- 3 The 14-19 Green Paper mentions assessment and examinations in so far as they contribute to league tables as drivers of improved performance. Otherwise, it largely ignores assessment and examinations. Successful reform of the qualifications structure for this age group depends heavily on reform of the examinations system. (Paragraph 10)
- 4 The government should place greater trust in the professionalism of teachers. Internal summative assessment should play a greater part in the examination system. (Paragraph 28)
- 5 The SHA proposal for the establishment of a cohort of Chartered Examiners, as set out in the Annex, should be piloted and, if successful, adopted nationally as soon as practicable. (Paragraph 34 and Annex)
- 6 As a supplement to other forms of assessment, national item banks of well developed assessment tools could be made available for current and future testing arrangements, such as national curriculum tests, GCSE and AS. (Paragraph 31)
- 7 Decisions on GCSE and AS grades should rely more on internal assessment by teachers. A2 papers should remain predominantly external examinations, with coursework where appropriate. (Paragraph 36)
- 8 At ages 7 and 14, teacher assessments, supported by online test scores, should be reported to parents, but not used to compile performance tables. (Paragraph 32)
- 9 The feasibility of having a cadre of professional salaried examiners and moderators who are not serving teachers should be investigated. (Paragraph 30)
- 10 A fundamental review of assessment should seek to promote a move from *assessment of learning* to *assessment for learning*, which focuses more strongly on the needs of the learner than the needs of the system. (Paragraph 23)
- 11 The random sampling tests carried out by the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) for national monitoring of standards and national levels of attainment should be reintroduced. (Paragraph 7, 37)
- 12 To ensure consistency, more emphasis should be placed on training in a range of assessment methods for teachers, both in initial training and in-service training courses. (Paragraph 26)
- 13 National performance tables in their present form, even when recording value added in addition to raw scores, have no part to play in a progressive assessment structure. They should be abolished. (Paragraph 6, 9)