

Response to the Education and Skills Select Committee enquiry into Testing and Assessment

1. The IEA welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the select committee on education and skills and also welcomes moves by government towards more personalised learning suited to the needs of the individual and not the testing and assessment system but believes that more needs to be done in supporting good assessment practice in schools, colleges and the workplace. .
2. The Institute of Educational Assessors (IEA) is an independent charity set up with the support of DfES and QCA to improve the quality of assessment by providing continuing professional development to teachers, lecturers and workplace assessors as well as the external assessment community.
3. In England there exists a well-established external testing system used as a prime means of validating, verifying and reporting on students' attainments.
4. Although the cost of this system is large at £610m (source PWC February 2005), it represents 1% of the total education budget of government and has created a system which attracts the continued confidence of the general public.
5. However a system of external testing alone is not ideal and government's recent policy initiatives in progress checks and diplomas have made some move towards addressing an imbalance between external testing and internal judgements made by those closest to the students, i.e. the teachers, in line with other European countries.
6. The Institute welcomes these moves towards creating a balance between external testing and internal assessment of student's attainments. which could result, given the right professional support, in a teaching community more adept at different practices in assessment alongside rigorous standards moderated by the awarding bodies.
7. Other European countries have already made this move towards a balance between internal and external assessment. According to the Programme for International Assessment of Students (PISA), other countries, such as Finland, achieve good standards in education while relying more heavily on internal assessment, only undertaking external assessment in a student's progression at the point of transfer from secondary to higher education. If it is the UK government's stated intention to continue to support young people with education and training up to the age of eighteen then the IEA believes that a reliance on an external testing system need not be as great as is currently the case and other models of assessment such as those adopted by other European Countries could be investigated further.

8. So a move towards a balance of assessment practice between the internal judgements of the teacher alongside external moderation from organisations such as the awarding bodies should be welcomed.
9. In England, according to Ofsted, one of the areas of concerns regarding school performance is that of assessment which remains one of the more variable practices within centres. The work of the National Strategies has helped to address these issues but the IEA thinks more work needs to be done in supporting teacher's professionalism in this vital area of education, that of teaching, learning and assessment. The IEA believes that a move towards balancing internal teacher judgements alongside rigorous standards in external assessment will help to address some of these concerns if teacher judgements can be supported through a framework that allows for the development of their own skills and capabilities in this vital area of education.
10. In support of this work to help teachers make valid and reliable assessment of their students' capabilities, The IEA is working with the Training and Development Agency (TDA) to support initial teacher training in assessment. At present PGCE courses only allow for a limited time on assessment issues, sometimes as little as sixty minutes over a nine month course, so the IEA has developed a toolkit for newly qualified teachers and students called 'First Steps in Assessment' that seeks to detail the practice, process and techniques of assessment needed by every teacher entering the profession for the first time.
11. Once in the classroom, the use of standardised assessment instruments are not always the best solution in dealing with the individual capabilities of every student. Initiatives such as Assessment for Learning and a move to more personalised learning, in line with government policy, are going a long way to addressing these issues. However these initiatives need to be effectively supported by professional development opportunities for teachers if they are to be more meaningful and sustainable. This will help teachers make consistently valid and reliable judgements resulting in better quality of assessment in schools throughout the country.
12. Indeed a move to personalisation underpinned by regular assessments, both formative and summative (the latter informed by tests and tasks drawn from a national bank and moderated externally by the awarding bodies), over the course of a period of study, might provide a more comprehensive picture of the capabilities of students across a wide range of core competencies within a given subject domain. These assessments would provide a more rounded view of the achievements of students and enable learning programmes, personal to the student, to be developed while maintaining national standards through light touch external moderation.
13. Over the course of the coming months, IEA will be outlining a role, purpose and scope for individuals based in schools, colleges and other

places of learning to take the lead on assessment issues, i.e. Chartered Educational Assessors. This would help to address the problems of variability and inconsistency in assessment practices, which OFSTED has identified. The role of these centre-based specialists, supported by a programme of professional development from the Institute, would be to provide assessment tools, support, mentoring and coaching for colleagues. These individuals would also be responsible for quality assuring assessment processes and standards within schools so that a common approach to good assessment practice can be developed between subject specialists and across different subjects. They would ensure that the data derived from assessment is used to feed back into and improve the teaching and learning process rather than merely for reporting or tracking purposes.

14. The Institute has also developed a Professional Framework which could underpin an accredited programme of training and qualifications, delivered by IEA's educational stakeholders, which would allow individual teachers to demonstrate their assessment knowledge and good assessment practices. The Framework outlines the role, competencies and behaviours needed by those undertaking assessment tasks in the classroom as well as externally via the awarding bodies. This tool is available online at www.ioea.org.uk. The Framework provides a structured approach to the process of assessment and the continuing professional development of those involved in assessment tasks so that, once assessment requirements have been identified, teachers can adopt good practice. The Framework will underpin the role of Chartered Educational Assessors in delivering better assessment practice.
15. All these developments are pertinent to the development of national curriculum and other assessments. For example, trust in the assessment system and, in particular, teachers' ability to make good assessments is essential to the changes, which the DfES' proposals on *Making Good Progress* envisage. The provision of progress tests for students is only one part of the full picture of delivering better educational standards. In order for progress tests to be meaningful we need to improve the system, processes and personal skills, which allow for good assessment practice in schools. This can only come about through the provision of professional support and development for teachers to allow them to become more expert at practising good assessment'. Through structured training and qualifications as well as access to exemplification materials, tools and resources we can bring about better quality assessment in our schools on a more flexible and personalised basis in a consistent manner. Such an approach would effectively support more personalised learning that allows for the fulfilment of every student's potential in education. The IEA hopes to contribute to these changes through its Professional Framework and Chartered Educational Assessor proposals.

16. General Issues**17. Why do we have a centrally run system of testing and assessment?**

18. Originally we relied on external testing to identify those students who would progress to higher education through university entrance examinations. Under the auspices of the Department and its predecessor bodies, a uniform system emerged loosely regulated from the centres but with the setting of syllabuses (specifications) and examinations delegated to independent examination boards. Over the years, as more students stayed in education and took examinations and as competition for places and jobs intensified, the demand for greater comparability across examinations grew and equal access to curriculum and qualifications became the norm. The introduction of National Criteria for GCSE and a National Curriculum and associated assessment arrangements in the 1980's resulted in the centralised system we now have. We now use external testing and examinations as the prime validation of a student's achievements and as a means of measuring the performance of schools and colleges. Unlike other leading European countries, we provide limited effective support to teachers in assessment. The Assessment for Learning programme is making inroads here, although this does not necessarily better equip teachers with improved summative assessment skills and expertise.

19. What other systems of assessment are in place both internationally and across the UK?

20. In the UK, vocational examinations rely on assessment throughout the course and in the workplace. These assessments are valued by the community and by employers, with none of the concerns attached to the validity of teacher assessments in schools manifesting themselves in this context. Indeed, students who achieve good results in traditional tests and examinations do not always go on to become active contributors to society. As we are all aware, employers often criticise the skills of young people in terms of basic numeracy and communications skills.

21. The OECD's Programme for International Assessment of Students (PISA) has revealed that countries where teacher assessment is at the hub of the assessment system generally out perform countries more reliant on the external testing of students, such as in the UK. This need not be the case in future if we can develop better assessment practice within schools, colleges and the workplace to match current assessment standards provided by the external awarding bodies.

22. In both the 2000 and 2003 PISA surveys Finland, Korea and Japan performed consistently well across the range of measures covered in the surveys. In each of these countries compulsory school age student

assessment is largely the responsibility of teachers rather than a reliance on external testing.

23. Finland's linear comprehensive education system, where students remain at the same schools from age 7 to 16, relies purely on teacher assessment to determine student achievement. All teachers must achieve a Masters degree prior to being allowed to teach. Schools are self-regulating (no external inspections) but must adhere to a national curriculum and national standards in assessment regulated by the National Board of Education.
24. Korea uses national scholastic achievement tests alongside continual teacher assessment based on a national curriculum. In the national tests two subjects are tested on one occasion each year with a sample of between 0.5 and one per cent of the total student population in Years 6, 9 and 10, i.e. at ages 12, 15 and 18. The results of school assessment are, however, generally not made public. Test scores are not supposed to be made available to students or parents. The test results are primarily used to monitor school standards and to monitor student progress.
25. Japan's compulsory schooling between age 6 and 15 does not use compulsory testing. Certification of completion at both the end of elementary and junior high school phases is made on the basis of internal teacher assessment following structured national guidance based on a compulsory national curriculum.
26. Therefore a move towards balancing assessments between internal teacher judgements and externally moderated standards is welcomed by the IEA in light of government's recently announced initiatives in Diplomas and progress tests.

27. Does a focus on national testing and assessment reduce the scope for creativity in the curriculum?

28. There is a danger in any system that learners will follow 'guidance' diligently and that teachers will be fearful of deviating from it and "teach to the test". Creativity and learning may then become secondary to the need to perform well on the big occasion, whether it be SATS, GCSE or A-level, on the results of which the school/college will be judged. There is nothing new here: as long ago as 1889 this danger was recognised, as the following quotation from *The Sacrifice of Education to Examination, letters from "all sorts and conditions of men, (ed Auberon Herbert)* shows:
 - i. The evil done by examinations to the teachers, or rather to those who should be teaching, but whose energies are largely absorbed in examining, might be diminished if the present excessive number of examinations were reduced, if their minuteness and detail were lessened, and if a wider range of tests were permitted, and less excess weight attached to the power of covering paper within narrow

limits of time.....My own experience has shown me that (examinations) have the most widely diverse effects, both on the teacher and taught, according to the principles upon which they are arranged. Where a minute specification of topics, and still worse, of books, is adopted, they are mischievous to both. They fetter the teacher in arranging his course of education; and they lead the taught to aim at cramming and to be impatient of any instruction not obviously resolvable into tips.

29. QCA's recent curriculum revisions, intended to allow for more creativity in the application of the curriculum are welcome. However, all teachers do not yet have the necessary skills to be more flexible, more personalised and more adaptive in the use of new technology, new teaching techniques and new forms of assessment.

30. The recent curriculum review needs to be supported by structured Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, as outlined above using the Institute's Professional Framework, for teachers to be able to make the most use of the greater flexibility that the curriculum allows.

31. Who is the QCA accountable to and is this accountability effective?

32. It would be inappropriate for the IEA to comment, as this is a matter for QCA.

33. What role should exam boards have in testing and assessment?

34. Traditionally examination boards (or awarding bodies) have set as well as applied the national standard to their syllabuses, examinations and grading. More recently the regulator has taken on the responsibility for determining the national standard and monitoring its application. Awarding bodies continue to play a major role in the application of that standard through their specifications and the consistent marking to the standard of candidates' work in all subjects. Where teacher judgements are concerned the role of the examination board is to ensure that these, like the marks of examiners of externally assessed components, are consistent with the national standard – i.e. not to replace teacher judgements regarding the capabilities of their students but to moderate the marks given against the national benchmark.

35. Teachers are best placed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of individual learners but are not always given the right support, skills or training to be able to be effective in this role. There is a role for awarding bodies in both the moderation of teacher judgements and the local training of teachers within local networks of suitably qualified assessors supported through a structured programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) aimed at developing the skills of teachers in good assessment practice. The qualified assessors – the

most experienced of whom would aspire to Chartered status – would be accredited to national standards by an independent organisation such as the IEA, They would be capable of making consistent judgements regarding student progress and achievements over time. Such a system would provide assurances that teacher judgements provide assessments to given national standards.

36. Work on assessing the reliability of teacher assessments in comparison with national external testing has been developed by QCA in collaboration with DfES and the National Strategies and conducted by QCA via the Assessing Pupil Performance programme in English and maths which has been adopted for national rollout by the DfES. This work can be built upon by the introduction of Chartered Educational Assessors, as outlined above.

37. National Key Stage Tests

38. *The current situation*

39. How effective are the current Key Stage tests?

40. The current Key Stage Tests have around fourteen objectives for their assessments. These include testing the individual student, testing the teacher of a group of students, assessing national standards of achievement for a range of students, assessing the performance of a group of teachers in a single school or across a number of schools, and also testing individual school's achievements in a single year and over time. In reality assessment instruments can only have a small number of objectives to be reliable, valid and fit for purpose.

41. Key Stage Tests also provide a snapshot in time of an individual student's performance and, as intimated above, are not a valid and reliable indicator of the overall skills and capabilities of an individual student.

42. Rather than relying on a single snapshot in time of a student in a limited range of subjects, it would be preferable to assess their skills, knowledge and experience over a greater period of time in order to arrive at an effective assessment of that student's capabilities. This would lend itself to a balance between teacher-based assessment, moderated by professionals such as Chartered Educational Assessors, and supported by light touch moderation from the awarding bodies.

43. Do they adequately reflect levels of performance of children and schools, and changes in performance over time?

44. Key Stage tests reflect achievements of schools over time to a certain extent. In terms of individual children, standardised tests can never accurately reflect individual students' capabilities without being tailored to a certain extent for accessibility issues. More personalised

assessments, which the government has announced as its direction of travel, will achieve greater validity over time but there is a tension between validity and reliability where single tests will give more reliable but less valid results than more personalised tests.

45. As different tests are run each year then the nature of a series of standardised levels is somewhat misleading. To get an accurate picture of consistent standards over time the same test would have to be run with similar groups of students each year, but this is impracticable.
46. From research carried out by the Institute of Education it has been suggested that as many as 30% of all students achieve an incorrect grade or mark for their work using standardised test scores. There is nothing new in such findings: the first studies on reliability of marking in the late 19th century came up with similar findings. Consequently, tests are not a reliable indicator of a student's overall capability, although as the test score error is consistent over time from series to series, it brings with it a degree of consistency.
- 47. Do they provide assessment for learning (enabling teachers to concentrate on areas of a pupil's performance that needs improvement)?**
48. Data from Key Stage tests can provide an indication of the likely areas students will need to develop in order to extend their capabilities but attention needs to be given to the nature of the questions selected which may not reflect accurately the knowledge attained by an individual student as the questions posed have been pre-selected by external examiners
49. A weak link between testing and assessment for learning is the individual capability of the teacher to be able to accurately take data from tests and apply it to personalised learning plans, combined with personalised and more flexible assessment methods, for a group of students. Teachers struggle to validate this type of learning consistently and so more structured CPD programmes of support are needed for teachers to be able to become more effective in the development of personalised learning and assessment plans.
50. Additionally, can summative outcomes from tests be used on a daily basis in lessons to develop the formative processes of students? Professor Paul Black argues that it is unlikely and that Assessment for Learning is process driven not summative outcome driven. In a recent article in the IEA's *Make the Grade* magazine, he said:
51. . A frequent misunderstanding is that any assessment by teachers, and in particular the use of a weekly test to produce a record of marks, constitutes formative assessment. It does not. Unless some learning action follows from the outcomes, such practice is merely frequent summative assessment: the key feature – interaction through feedback is missing. Another misunderstanding is the belief that this is about

the coursework assessment that forms part of some GCSEs; such assessment cannot aid learning unless there is active feedback to improve pupils' work as it develops.... The research showing that a diet of marks does not improve learning, and that comments can do so only if pupils are not distracted by marks.

52. Key stage tests data does not readily transfer to aid assessment in the foundation subjects; this is a further argument for the introduction of highly skilled Chartered Educational Assessors to develop assessment practices in both formative and summative capacities for these subjects.

53. Does testing help to improve levels of attainment?

54. Testing helps to improve levels of attainment in tests but due to the nature of teaching to the test, many students have a grasp of a limited range of knowledge and skills which may not meet the needs of employers for more rounded students who are able to apply critical thinking skills from one area to another area.

55. The points made in response to the previous question also apply here.

56. Are they effective in holding schools accountable for their performance?

57. National Curriculum Tests are accepted by parents and the general public as giving a broad indication of the achievements of both individual children and individual schools at a moment in time and form part of the accountability framework of education to parents and the general public.

58. However the tests are not perfect due to the reasons mentioned above. In light of this the IEA believes that government policy initiatives around progress tests are set to address some of these issues however at present the objectives for which they are held are too numerous and there are concerns over validity and reliability.

59. How effective are performance measures such as value-added scores for schools?

60. Contextual value added scores are seen as a more reliable indicator of success than league tables based on raw data. Schools use this data to help in tracking performance along with other data, such as the Fischer Family Trust data and CATs (or their equivalent).

61. As an indicator of performance measures the value added data alone is not as reliable as when combined with other data sources but it is preferable to raw data.

62. Are league tables based on test results an accurate reflection of how well schools are performing?

63. Performance tables are only a small slice of the overall picture of a school or student's achievements. Other indicators such as the development of a student's attitude and motivation to learn, and to provide more holistic teaching experiences all provide a better quality measurement of a student's experience are missing from a simplistic testing instrument.

64. To what extent is there 'teaching to the test'?

65. The answers provided to earlier questions are pertinent here. While little empirical evidence exists, anecdotal evidence suggests that teaching to the test is widespread among teachers and schools because the main focus of government and public attention is test results as a means of indicating education standards but the two are not the same. A further pertinent observation from *The Sacrifice of Education to Examination, letters from "all sorts and conditions of men (1889)* may be of interest to the Committee:

66. Everything is now sacrificed to the whim of the examiner, who *may* be a clever man, but who evidently writes his questions with the one aim of showing his own amount of learning. But the worst feature of the case is that all interest is taken out of the studies. A teacher must not now awaken an enthusiasm that will send a student to ransack a library on the loved subject, - because it is not prescribed by the examiner! We are becoming year by year narrower and shallower, more shut into one rut, more confined to a few subjects

67. As that quotation from a different age would suggest, testing and examinations do not necessarily result in the provision of a rounded education to individuals who are capable of making an effective contribution to society. Rather, we may be churning out individuals who can pass tests and who can achieve good results to a given, known test, but who cannot necessarily apply their knowledge and skills to other situations, hence the concern from employers about skill levels among young people.

68. Instead we need a more rounded indicator of the capabilities of students' performance and the IEA's view is that this needs to come from a prolonged assessment of an individual carried out in their locality over the course of their study by a suitably trained and qualified educational assessor, but still subject to moderation by the awarding bodies to ensure that national standards of achievement are maintained and education continues to attract the confidence of parents and the general public.

69. How much of a factor is 'hot-housing' in the fall-off in pupil performance from Year 6 to Year 7?

70. There is a known and well-documented phenomenon which highlights the decline in attainment from Year 6 to Year 7.

71. This may be caused by the hothouse effect, namely learners studying a limited curriculum in the final term of Primary education in preparation for the National Curriculum Tests. On arriving in a new institution, they are inclined not to work as efficiently or effectively since there is no immediate terminal public examination, a further example of the undesirable backwash effect of external examinations on the curriculum.
72. Fall-off in performance may also be caused by learners switching from a regime where they are taught by the same person for all subjects, to a regime where they are taught by specialist teachers using specialist equipment in discrete physical locations for each curriculum area.
73. It may be caused by the need for individuals to reorganise their own social structures and hierarchies, having left one institution where each was the oldest within the hierarchy, to one where each is the youngest within the hierarchy. They also have to renegotiate their relationships with their peers, many of whom they have not met before. Each individual also has to learn the rights, responsibilities and rules within the new institution and develop a working relationship with others in the new institution.
74. The decline in attainment and progress made by some Year 7 learners is probably caused by a mixture of all of these factors.

75. Does the importance given to test results mean that teaching generally is narrowly focused?

76. Again, earlier comments are pertinent to this question.
77. Possibly. It may be narrowly focused on achieving a test result rather than producing high levels of educational standards among our young people so in real terms our competitiveness is not the highest among European countries as measured by PISA, and can be improved.

78. What role does assessment by teachers have in teaching and learning?

79. Earlier observations on the impact of external assessment on teaching and learning are relevant to this question. It seems to IEA that, were teachers to develop their skills in educational assessment, the impact on the learning programmes would be beneficial. Teaching and learning only gives half of the picture. Without any educational assessment, teachers would not know what to teach next or if the teaching has been effective. In order to make the best use of the data provided by assessment, teachers need good support mechanisms, such as IEA's Professional Framework.
80. Instead of being involved in teaching and learning, therefore, teachers need to be involved in teaching, learning and assessment. Like other

countries which adopt a balance between internal and external assessment on students up to the age of eighteen, when decisions are made about career choices or higher education, teachers need to engage in assessment to a greater degree.

81. Better and more sharply focussed assessment by the teacher in the classroom would benefit the taxpayer who pays around £610m to support the current external tests system as well as improving teaching and learning.

82. The future

83. Should the system of national tests be changed?

84. We need to develop national tests over time in line with the needs of students and parents. More localised assessment supported by a rigorous programme of structured CPD, providing the appropriate skills to teachers to allow them to mark to national standards and to allow for both personalised learning and a more flexible response to the needs of individual students. This would still need to be supported by a system of national external moderation to ensure that assessments continued to attract the confidence of the general public in educational standards over time.

85. The IEA Professional Framework and the Chartered Educational Assessor, described earlier in this response, could be the tools to provide such teacher judgements to national standards.

86. If so, should the tests be modified or abolished?

87. The Secretary of State has suggested that there should be a move to more personalised assessment to measure how a pupil's level of attainment has improved over time. Pilot areas to test proposals have just been announced. The IEA supports this move.

88. Would the introduction of this kind of assessment make it possible to make an overall judgment on a school's performance?

89. Although the proposals are to be welcomed as an indicator of intent, they are too rigid and inflexible as they seek to address issues of performance by rolling out more external testing of the Key Stage type which are the IEA's underlying causes of concern about educational standards in this country.

90. Would it be possible to make meaningful comparisons between different schools?

91. For the reasons given above, simply rolling out more external testing may not address the issues behind improving our educational standards.
- 92. What effect would testing at different times have on pupils and schools?**
93. It is hard to predict if we don't know what we are testing or how we are testing it. Clearly the organisational implications of greater personalisation would need to be considered. Those in schools and colleges are best placed to comment on this aspect of change.
- 94. Would it create pressure on schools to push pupils to take tests earlier? If Key Stage tests remain, what should they be seeking to measure? If, for example, performance at Level 4 is the average level of attainment for an eleven year old, what proportion of children is it reasonable to expect to achieve at or above that level?**
95. If students were given the right amount of support by suitably qualified teachers in educational assessment then they would be able to take tests when they, and not the system, are ready. This would help to ease the burden on an already stretched external testing system. However, if students' testing could be undertaken in the classroom and externally validated through light touch moderation by the awarding bodies and more localised assessment support, then there is no reason why this move to balance internal and external testing should not work as is the case in other European countries.
96. Over time more personalised learning development plans could be introduced supported by personalised assessment plans that would allow each student to develop to his or her own potential in a supportive system.
97. A number of schools do this already and there is a case for on-demand testing that is being increasingly advocated by leading assessment experts, such as Professors David Hargreaves, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam.
- 98. How are the different levels of performance expected at each age decided on? Is there broad agreement that the levels are appropriate and meaningful?**
99. These indicators are set by QCA following consultation with educational and awarding body stakeholders who are better placed than IEA to comment on their appropriateness
- 100. Testing and assessment at 16 and after**

- 101. Is the testing and assessment in “summative” tests (for example, GCSE, AS, A2) fit for purpose?**
102. Like the national curriculum tests, the IEA considers that these public examinations may not be ideal but they are accepted by parents and the general public as accountable measures of attainment.
103. There is, however, a very real question as to whether we need a national system of qualifications at age 16 when, increasingly, students are staying in education and training. Indeed a recent government policy was announced in the autumn of 2006 indicating that all children will be supported by access to education and training opportunities until the age of 18, effectively raising the school leaving age by two years.
104. The question of the appropriateness of a public examination at 16 was raised in the 1940s by the Norwood Report and when GCE O and A-levels were introduced in 1951 the expectation was that those students who progressed to A-level (at that time very few) would bypass O-level. The current talk of an 18 year old leaving age would point to a 16 year old “leaving examination” being redundant and could be replaced by a system of moderated and standardised teacher assessment, with all the training, constraints and use of national standards as mentioned earlier in this response. Again, the concept of Chartered Educational Assessors would be an important feature of such a system.
105. An externally provided qualification like A level and others (the Diploma, for example) would remain relevant and necessary to 18 year olds as a summative statement of their achievements in the education system and as an entry into Higher Education and employment. Whether it would be right to rely on these assessments as a means of holding schools and colleges accountable to the public and government is a question that needs debate.
106. Additionally tests that are truly valid are tailored to the needs of individual students in assessing what needs to be assessed in the right manner. However tests that are reliable across different groups of students are naturally standardised around a norm and are hence could be considered not truly valid tests.
- 107. Are the changes to GCSE coursework due to come into effect in 2009 reasonable? What alternative forms of assessment might be used?**
108. Course work has had various interpretations over its many years of existence – specified work carried out at home or in the field, as is often the case now in examinations, or an assessment of the work carried out by students as part of the course. Highlighting the latter enables a coherent picture of the students’ attainments in the course to emerge and to provide a rounded picture of what has been achieved.

Work carried out as part of the course should be work undertaken in the classroom and validated by the teacher over the course of the academic year which can, therefore, be a true reflection of the learning that is taking place. It also overcomes the problems of plagiarism. Accredited specialist assessors in a school, such as Chartered Educational Assessors, could be a means of ensuring good quality school/college-based assessments which command public confidence.

- 109. What are the benefits of exams and coursework? How should they work together? What should the balance between them be?**
110. Earlier answers are pertinent to this question.
111. Formal exams can be a useful measure of knowledge gained and retained and can help the learners, to some extent, use their skills developed over the course of study. However, in some subjects like history, learners will not have the opportunity to use acquired skills, e.g. research skills, in a formal exam. Assessing the work of the course enables those wider skills to be formally acknowledged in the profile which is built up of a student's capabilities and attainment.
112. On the other hand there is a constant risk of plagiarism if coursework is uncontrolled and learners' time may be disproportionately used for the relatively low weightings for coursework in some subjects, although others have significantly more weighting of marks to coursework.
113. The current review of coursework and the introduction of controlled tasks is therefore important and the IEA would appreciate an input into this.
- 114. Will the ways in which the new 14-19 diplomas are to be assessed impact on other qualifications, such as GCSE?**
115. There is always a danger in introducing a new qualification alongside existing, respected qualifications. Steps have to be taken to ensure that the new product gains respect and is wanted by both the learner and users of qualifications such as HE and employers. In the case of the new Diploma there is evidence of a real intention to make the new qualification work and of cooperation across educationalists, employers and awarding bodies. The IEA is anxious to support the new qualification and, in particular the element within the Diplomas which relies on "local" assessment – i.e. assessment of applied learning. We envisage this being undertaken by a Chartered Educational Assessor, authenticated by the IEA and we are pleased to have been involved in discussions with QCA, NAA and SSAT. The Chartered Educational Assessor could quality assure the assessment regimes across consortia, at both the local school or college level and across the consortium as a whole. This quality assurance will underwrite the

accuracy of the assessments across the consortium and validate the assessment outputs.

116. The assessment of the new Diplomas will be different in kind from assessments that have gone before them. The new diplomas will rely on a mixture of end of unit tests, managed by the diploma awarding bodies – similar in type to the current GCSE or GCE. In addition, however, they will have an element of local assessment that will focus on the application of skills, understanding and knowledge.
117. This new approach could have implications for GCSE and for the moderation of course work, since it will allow those individuals accredited as a Chartered Educational Assessors to moderate the assessment of a school and leave the awarding body with only a light touch sample of moderation to be carried out. It could, therefore, demonstrate that such an approach might be relevant in other contexts like GCSE, although there would continue to be a need for awarding bodies to take steps to assure national standards. The IEA has no purchase or ownership of those standards; our role is in relation to the support of teachers and the continuing professional development which they need.
- 118. Is holding formal summative tests at ages 16, 17 and 18 imposing too great a burden on students? If so, what changes should be made?**
119. The answer given above to testing after 16 is relevant here. In brief, if government policy is to ensure training and education for all individuals up to the age of eighteen, then the need for national formalised external testing is reduced below this age level.
120. Instead we should aim for national cohort sampling to get national standards of achievement and opt for more localised teacher-based assessment supported by light touch moderation from the awarding bodies up to the age of eighteen with external testing being retained at age eighteen when career choices are made to continue studying at higher education or enter the workplace.
- 121. To what extent is frequent, modular assessment altering both the scope of teaching and the style of teaching?**
122. Modular assessment has had major benefits in enabling students for whom a single end-of-course assessment would be too great a hurdle to attain the standard of a qualification such as A-level. However, there needs to be a balance struck in any modular course between the coherence of the whole and its fragmentation into shorter learning chunks. Too many modules can, in this respect, be as detrimental as a single end of course examination was to the attainment of the cohort as a whole.

123. Allowing teachers more flexibility to deliver and assess via modular courses has merits, such as not teaching to a final end-of-course test (although more atomised testing can have the same effect), and demerits, such as the possibility of not applying consistent and rigorous processes and standards. The awarding bodies have a major role to play here ensuring consistency and rigour from module to module as well as across the whole subject
124. Modular assessment can allow for a wider scope of teaching and learning styles to be accommodated provided that the assessment instrument applied to a particular module is sensitive to the objectives of the module – a practical orientation, for example, requires a different form of assessment than does concentration on factual knowledge. Modular learning might be appropriate to individualised learning pathways
- 125. How does the national assessment system interact with university entrance?**
126. University entrance is traditionally based upon achievement at “A” Level. Over recent years alternative demonstrations of reaching the standard required have been accepted – for example vocational qualifications, the IB and access courses. Widening participation is taken very seriously by Higher Education.
127. However, according to some universities the number of candidates acquiring higher grades suggests that traditional qualifications provide insufficient discrimination to enable the best students to be identified - hence the call for an A* grade. A number of selective universities have based their entry requirements on unit grades, that is the scores and grades achieved, not in the subject as a whole, but rather in the scores attained in each of the unit tests, thereby giving a fuller picture of attainment.
128. This equates to a six-fold increase in the amount of data available to an admissions tutor. Many universities are unlikely to have the staffing to interpret or collect such a wealth of data.
129. Again, it is easy to forget that concern over the quality of students entering university is not a new phenomenon. In 1960 when a mere 5% of the student population entered Universities, the Northern Universities’ Joint Matriculation Board observed in its Annual Report:
130. Among freshmen in general the level of ability to write English is disappointingly low. The suitability of the present GCE Examination in English Language at the Ordinary level is not here being criticised so far as it concerns the 16-year old candidate for whom it was designed, although opinion about this aspect of the examination is not wholly favourable. It seems to be generally agreed however that the degree of ability to express oneself which might be accepted from the 16-year old candidate is not sufficient at university entry, that too often apparently such facility as may be present at 16 is not encouraged to develop *pari passu* with the development which goes on in the other aspects of the Sixth form curriculum. It may

well be that if all the students were sufficiently “literate” at entry, some of them might lapse into comparative “illiteracy” while at the university unless care were taken to ensure that further development is actively encouraged and fostered within the university itself. That is a matter for the university authorities themselves; the duty of the Board is to ensure that at entry those who have been examined by the Board as potential university students have gone further than what is now accepted as O-level English Language.” (AQA Archive, 1960)

131. What does it mean for a national system of testing and assessment that universities are setting entrance tests as individual institutions?

132. Clearly this is all about the ability of universities to select with confidence the best students for their courses. Were they to set their own tests, they could undermine public confidence in test outcomes produced by the awarding bodies. It would not be in the best interest of students if they were faced with a battery of individual entry examinations. In reality only a very few – admittedly the most prestigious – universities would take this step and it is questionable whether even they would have the resources needed to do so.

133. More worryingly is the stand which universities may take on the value of the new Diplomas. Their acceptance for university entrance is critical to their value and to public confidence.

134. Teacher-based judgements on the abilities of students within the summative A-level system would enable a more rounded picture of the students to be provided to users of qualifications, including the universities. Those judgements would need to be supported by CPD in order to command public trust. As stated earlier, other countries like Finland already do this.

135. Concluding remarks

136. The IEA would be pleased to elaborate on any part of this submission in a written form or in person, if called to give evidence to the Committee. As an Institute we are committed to improving the standard of assessment in schools, colleges and the workplace, to supporting those involved in assessments through CPD and to increasing public confidence in assessment by means of Chartered status. We are well placed to support new initiatives such as progress tests and the new Diplomas and are ready to work with educational and employer stakeholders to ensure that these and other initiatives improve the quality of learning and its outcomes for the benefit of students and the nation.

Kathleen Tattersall

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