



## Teacher Assessment, Standardisation, Moderation and External Verification 2015-16

### Summary

Teacher assessments, internal standardisation and cluster moderation are familiar parts of the education landscape in Wales.

The most recent aspect of the whole process is the External Verification Programme, which has now been in place for two years.

Though we appreciate the rationale of the Programme in terms of raising confidence in and providing support for robust assessment, standardisation and moderation processes, and though the requirements of the Programme itself appear reasonable, the reality is that a huge new workload has been placed on teachers, which has caused considerable additional stress – albeit as an unintended consequence.

### 2015-16 main concerns

Some of the statutory requirements relating to assessment, standardization and moderation are contained in the **National Curriculum (Moderation of Assessment Arrangements for the Second and Third Key Stages)(Wales) Order** (the Order).

Further requirements are listed in the guidance document **Statutory Assessment Arrangements for the Foundation Phase and the end of Key Stages 2 and 3** (Welsh Government, November 2015).

Other elements are not statutory, but are part of the External Verification Programme (the Programme).

Instructions given to schools in some areas went far beyond the requirements of the Order or the Programme.

Following a request for clarification by UCAC, Welsh Government officials prepared a set of FAQs. It

soon became evident that there were very substantial discrepancies between the messages going out at local level and the details coming from Welsh Government.

It seems that it is primarily at a regional and/or local level that the majority of unreasonable demands have arisen.

That raises questions about the nature, quality and content of the communication between the consortia and its challenge advisers, Local Authorities and teachers in schools.

These are the main areas where inconsistency which led to unreasonable demands:

- **Evidence of learners' work for moderation cluster meetings:** teachers were told to provide 9 pieces of work per pupil (6 samples had been requested for Mathematics and Science the previous year); but according to the Welsh

Government, no specific number of tasks were required

- **Evidence of learners work for school visits:** schools were advised that external verifiers would have the right to ask to see *portfolios* in addition to those prepared for the cluster meetings (and thus give the impression that portfolios needed to be prepared for every learner), as well as recordings/videos of oral work; however, according to the Welsh Government, verifiers could ask to see *the everyday school work of up to 3 additional learners*
- **the level of detail required, and sample materials:** teachers were misled about the level of detail required in terms of the annotations on pupils work; a 100 page sample portfolio was presented in Maths thereby creating the impression that this was the level of expectation
- **overemphasis on specific format:** we were made aware of a school where the portfolios had been approved the previous year, but this year it was deemed that they didn't conform to the ideal format, and therefore they needed to change – despite there being no change in the general interpretation of levels
- **requirement to hold cluster moderation meetings for the Foundation Phase:** it was suggested to schools that this was a statutory requirement, even though the relevant documentation is quite clear that that is not the case; indeed, only even internal standardization would be regarded as good practice
- **requirement to scan times and create hyperlinks – and also submit hard copy:** countless hours were spent by teachers in scanning and creating hyperlinks to specific areas of learners' work; teachers were also required to submit the work in hard copy with

post-it notes at the relevant places; this requirement was presented as being compulsory (an example was given of one sample in one subject taking 7 hours to complete)

- **requirement to upload all work:** teachers were attempting to upload portfolios, often in the face of severe technical problems; once again this the requirement was presented as being mandatory
- **requirement to create a log of internal standardization/moderation processes:** this was bureaucratic additional requirement presented as being mandatory

We accept the majority of the above problems relate to a lack of clarity and consistency of messages, and a lack of effective communication. However, this is an important lesson for future years.

In addition, there are some concerns about the process itself:

- **the timing of the process (1):** especially in the secondary sector, the process comes at a very busy period in terms of controlled assessments and oral exams for qualifications at Key Stage 4 and 5
- **the timing of the process (2):** the deadline for completing work by the date of the cluster meeting, brings the deadlines for submitting levels forward very substantially
- **additional pressure on the Welsh Departments in dual-stream schools:** because they have to prepare portfolios First Language and Second Language
- **moderating 4 subjects annually in KS2:** this statutory requirement creates unnecessary workload; this is particularly the case in smaller primary schools, where the entire burden falls on the shoulders of a single teacher; it could be argued that every other year would be acceptable

- **definition of levels:** the definitions vary widely between Local Authorities concrete and detailed guidance is needed to ensure consistency
- **undue pressure to change levels:** teachers and headteachers complain about the pressure on them to change levels and outcomes, in the light of the threat that the school/LA results appear too low, leading to awards unfavorable results, for example in terms of school categorization
- **lack of feedback:** schools feel they do not get feedback at school level individual to improve their cluster systems; they do not even receive feedback of any kind (a general report) within the timescales that would be useful to them in terms of implementing improvements - although the deadlines set for them are absolutely concrete

We take the opportunity to ask is there not a conflict of interest inbuilt in the process in that the regional consortia are members of the 'Partnership' that runs the national external verification programme - and simultaneously scrutinise the standardization and moderation processes, which are largely organized and driven by the regional consortia themselves.



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